20 YEARS ON: A CELEBRATION OF TRAINSPOTTING

The Coen Brothers • Star Wars Episode VIII • The Walking Dead

EMPIRE

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COVER 1 OF 2



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ED'S LETTER

IT'S TRULY AN EPIC BATTLE, BUT HONESTLY NOT ONE we thought we'd see on screen. As a kid you may have imagined it, tucked under the covers waiting for sleep to come. As an adult, you may have fought about the hypothetical outcome with friends, pint in hand. My own version of the latter went a little bit like this: "Everyone thinks Superman will crush Batman, but he is the most messed-up, dangerous superhero ever. Those toys!" "But they won't work against Superman. And anyway, he's got actual powers so would just melt Batman with his eyes." "No way, he's too good and he'd just totally cripple him with Kryptonite." The argument that never reached a resolution.

Batman v Superman: Dawn Of Justice could take us closer to that resolution though. And there's no-one better placed to delve into the complexities of this head-to-head than Henry Cavill and Ben Affleck, who lift the lid on their respective superheroes.

This is also a peek into the extended DC Universe, so we were thrilled to spend time with the actor who's going to reboot the biggest female superhero ever: Gal Gadot as Wonder Woman.

We're not quite finished, though. Legendary comic book artist Jim Lee — who illustrated, among others, *Batman: Hush* and *Superman: For Tomorrow* — created something truly special for us: an exclusive *Empire* cover for our subscribers (above). This kind of super-cool cover is just one of the benefits of being a subscriber (not to mention not needing to put on trousers and leave the house). See p.118 for full details if you want to sign up.

Outside of the DC world, there's a wealth of other great exclusives in this issue: Irvine Welsh writes for us on 20 years of *Trainspotting*, some of Hollywood's biggest stars talk to us about being part of the Coen brothers' universe and we look into just what makes *The Walking Dead* such incredible television.

Finally: as we went to press, we were hit with a devastating double-blow. In the same week, we lost both David Bowie and Alan Rickman to cancer. Bowie was one of Britain's great visionary artists and, while primarily in music, he had a unique impact on film. Rickman, of course, was our Sheriff Of Nottingham, our Hans Gruber, our Severus Snape — an essential part of any film-lover's life, whatever their age. Chris Hewitt pays tribute to both on p.12.

Until next month,

Terri

TERRI WHITE
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

EMPIRE

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Terri White

ART
Creative Director
Chris Lupton
020 7859 8642

Deputy Art Director
Adam Gerrard
020 7520 6447

Photographic Director
Debi Berry
020 7208 3705

Designer
Olly Gibbs
020 7295 8595

Junior Designer
Ally Wybrew
020 7295 8570

Picture Desk Assistant
Nicola Neville
020 7208 3179

WORDS
Features Editor
Dan Jolin
020 7520 6439

Reviews Editor
Nick de Semlyen
020 7295 5437

News Editor
Chris Hewitt
020 7295 5354

Senior Writer
Adam Smith

Editor-At-Large
Nev Pierce

COPY
Associate Editor (Production)
Liz Beardsworth
020 7295 8543

ONLINE
Editor-In-Chief (Digital)
James Dyer
020 7295 8558

Online Staff Writer
Phil de Semlyen
020 7295 5352

Junior Online Writer
Emma Thrower
020 7295 8503

Junior Online Writer
John Nugent
020 7520 6519

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Simon Braund, Angie Errigo, Ian Freer, Will Lawrence, Ian Nathan, Kim Newman, David Parkinson, Damon Wise

CONTRIBUTORS
Words: Neil Alcock, Eve Barlow, Simon Braund, Simon Crook, Fred Dellar, David Hughes, Helen O'Hara, Patrick Peters, Kat Poole, Olly Richards, Anna Smith (ALS), Sam White, Irvine Welsh, Owen Williams, Paul Wilson. **Subbing:** Anna Wood. **Photography:** Matt Holyoak. **Illustrations:** Noma Bar, Jethro Haynes, Infomen, Bill McConkey, Justin Metz, John Royle, Peter Strain.

BAUER MEDIA
Chief Executive **Paul Keenan**
Publishing Director **Liz Martin**
Business Analyst **Natalie Talbot**
Managing Editor **Sophie Price**

MARKETING
Communications Director **Jess Blake** 0207-208 3424
Direct Marketing Manager **Julie Spires** 01733 468164
Senior Marketing Manager **Natalie Wilkins** 020-7208 3535
Marketing Executive **Alex Penge** 020-7208 3521
Direct Marketing Executive **Rebecca Lambert** 01733 468804
Newstrade Marketing Manager, Men's, Film & Music **Dave Clark** 020-7520 6465

PRODUCTION
Print Production Controller **Carl Lawrence** 01733-468858
Ad Production Controller **Katie Kerry** 01733-468878
ePublishing Production Director **Alan Kindell** 020-7859 8604

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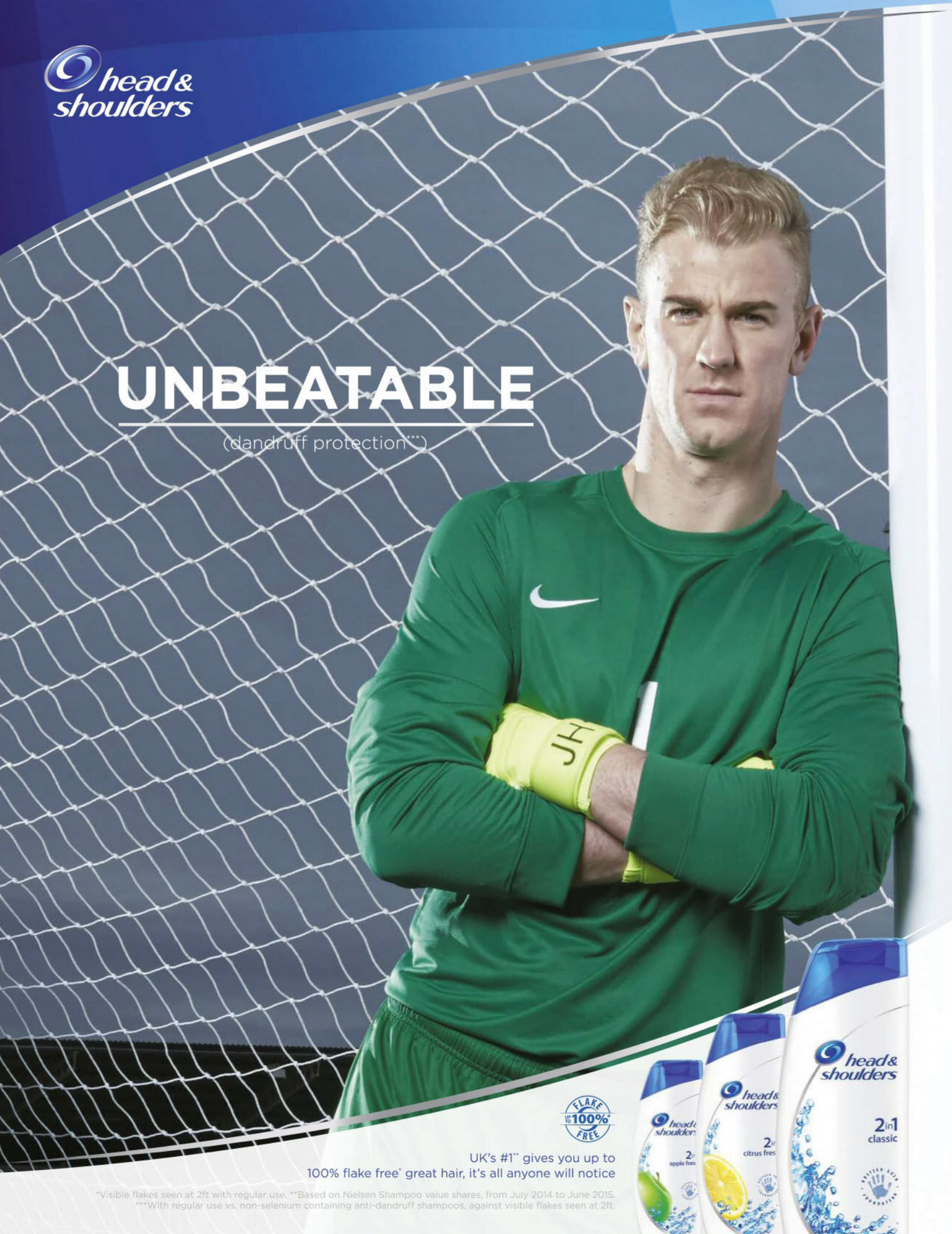
INTERNATIONAL & SYNDICATION
International Director **Susan Voss**

INTERNATIONAL EDITIONS
Danny Murphy (Australia) dmurphy@bauer-media.com.au
Khaldoun Qaddoura (Arabia) khaldoun@empire-arabia.com

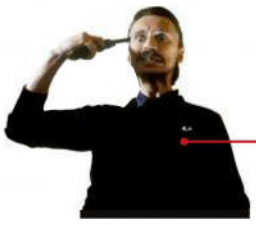
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CONTENTS



Features

48 THE WALKING DEAD Investigating the huge success of the TV zombie phenomenon. Something to do with brains. And guts.

56 BATMAN V SUPERMAN: BATMAN The Dark Knight Rises Back... as Ben Affleck! And he is very cross with Superman for killing thousands of people.

66 BATMAN V SUPERMAN: WONDER WOMAN The world's longest-awaited superhero hits the screen in the form of Gal Gadot. We won't see her invisible jet, though.

70 BATMAN V SUPERMAN: SUPERMAN Henry Cavill returns as The Man Of Steeling Himself For Bat-Battle!

78 BATMAN OR SUPERMAN? We asked a bunch of famouses whether they're on Team Bruce or Team Clark.

80 HIGH-RISE Ben Wheatley's gone from *Down Terrace* to *High-Rise* in four movies. Talk about career-building...

86 THE WITCH Director Robert Eggers is here to terrify you, and your little dog too.

92 TRAINSPOTTING AT 20 Irvine Welsh writes about seeing his first novel become that massive Brit-flick hit. Contains no uses of the word "radge", so we've put one here.

100 THE COEN BROTHERS George Clooney, Tilda Swinton and more help us decode the Coens — to show us, if you will, the life of their minds.

106 THE EMPIRE INTERVIEW: CATE BLANCHETT Face to face with an actor who attracts so much awards buzz that she may as well permanently wear a beard of golden bees.

112 CAPTAIN EO What happened when George Lucas, Francis Ford Coppola and Michael Jackson teamed up to make a Disney attraction. Try eating the wrong kind of mushroom and you might get close.







Clockwise from above: Jeremy irons out a few kinks in the Batfleck battle-armour in *Batman v Superman*; Emily takes the blunt approach to crimefighting in *Sicario*; *Point Break* channels *Kick-Start: The Bloody Weird Years*.

Regulars

8 PREMIERE No jungle too wild, no ski-slope too steep, no London location too far from the nearest Tube stop: the world's most intrepid movie-news section presents first gawps at *Tarzan*, *Eddie The Eagle* and *London Has Fallen*. Plus tons more.

32 HOW MUCH IS A PINT OF MILK? We talk cow-lactate with the multi-talented Lily James: Downton Abbess, War And Peace-maker, Pride + Prejudice + Zombie-decaptiator.

36 IN CINEMAS Spotting the genius of *Spotlight*, pointing out the flaws in *Point Break* and, uh, tromboning the pretty-goodness of *Trumbo*... Let's bury our faces in February movies together.

119 RE.VIEW Things are getting spirited in this issue's home-ent section with *Macbeth* and *Crimson Peak*. Wooooo.

126 THE VIEWING GUIDE *The Martian*: examined in such anally retentive detail that you'd think Matt Damon had been trapped on Uranus.

154 CLASSIC SCENE A sharp reminder of those crimefighting fashion tips consistently ignored by *Batman v Superman*'s moody combatants, courtesy of Pixar's *The Not-The-Fantastic-Four-ibles*.

• SPINE LINE WINNERS ISSUE 320: NEWSSTAND: "YOUR PERSISTENCE SURPRISES EVEN ME. YOU'RE GOING TO GIVE MERCENARIES A BAD NAME" IS FROM *RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK*. SUBS: "I'M GOING TO GET ALL OF MY FAVOURITE VILLAINS TO SIGN MY MAGAZINE!" IS FROM *MINIONS*. CONGRATULATIONS TO JAMES JP MURPHY, LUCIEN WAUGH-DALY, CONRAD SMITH, KATIE GLENHOLME, KAL SINGH, KERRY MCLEAN, BARBARA SLATER, GORDON WENLOCK, JANINE THOMPSON AND ADAM KELLY.


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FIRST LOOK EXCLUSIVE!

LORD OF THE ABS

ALEXANDER SKARSGÅRD *IS* THE NEW TARZAN

TARZAN TURNS 104 this year, and he's never looked better. The 'dad at the beach holding it in' look favoured by Johnny Weissmuller has gone, and Alexander Skarsgård has brought his washboard abs to *The Legend Of Tarzan*. "They're really making the most of Alex's body," laughs his Jane, Margot Robbie. "Jane ends up in tatters too, but not quite to the extent of Tarzan."

Cinema has given Edgar Rice Burroughs' creation short shrift recently, as you'll know if you're one of the few who saw 2014's mo-capped *Tarzan* (starring Kellan Lutz), or the fewer still who saw Casper Van Dien out-acted by his own loincloth in 1998's *Tarzan And The Lost City*. But director David Yates' lavish blockbuster hopes to show that there's more to the Lord Of The Apes than just swinging around the jungle. Forgoing the origin-story route, Yates' take catches up with this Tarzan after he's been civilised in London, when something draws him back to the jungle.

"It's about Lord Greystoke going back to being Tarzan," explains Skarsgård. "It's about someone who's very controlled, someone who keeps a lid on the animal within. Then slowly that savage part of him comes out."

Yates was attracted by the idea of making the biggest-budget *Tarzan* since Disney's Phil Collins-drenched animation in 1999. "*Tarzan* has never been done with a real wallop of action and entertainment and scale and budget," he says. "That's what we're doing. I hope it'll surprise people."

Yet Yates isn't straying too hard from the template. "There's still a Tarzan's-friends-with-all-the-animals vibe," laughs Samuel L. Jackson, who plays the hero's buddy, George Washington Williams. "And vine-swinging, and all that good shit." OWEN WILLIAMS

***THE LEGEND OF TARZAN* IS OUT ON JULY 8.**



Alexander Skarsgård as Tarzan. You could grate a banana on those abs.



8 QUESTIONS EPISODE VIII CAN ANSWER

WHERE CAN *THE FORCE AWAKENS'* FOLLOW-UP GO NEXT?

THERE HAS BEEN AN awakening — and we all felt it. J. J. Abrams' *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* opened in December and demolished virtually every box-office record in existence. But it also left a few unanswered questions (and honest-to-goodness cliffhangers) for Rian Johnson to tackle when he takes the reins on *Star Wars Episode VIII*. Beware: here be SPOILERS!

1 What is Rey's surname?
We never learn Rey's surname during *The Force Awakens*. Yet someone left her on Jakku in the care of Simon Pegg's Unkar Plutt. But who was it? Making her Rey Skywalker seems too obvious (and would Luke just abandon his offspring rather than entrust them with Leia?). One theory suggests Rey could be Rey Kenobi, the granddaughter of Obi-Wan. They have similar fashion sense, Obi-Wan's voice can be briefly heard during Rey's flashback (thanks to Ewan McGregor), and she manipulates the mind of Daniel Craig's stormtrooper in the fashion of Ben in *A New Hope*. Did Obi-Wan break his Jedi vow of celibacy? The naughty scamp.

2 Who is Supreme Leader Snoke?
Some have speculated that Andy Serkis' shadowy Snoke is actually Vader, based on unshakeable pictorial evidence. Namely, the two have scars on their skulls in roughly the same place. Never mind that they don't look or sound alike, or that Snoke's appearance was only firmed up at the last minute. We're mainly crossing our fingers that the dictator-in-waiting turns out to be really tiny. You know what they say about men with giant holograms...

3 Is Han Solo really dead?
Harrison Ford wanted to kill off Han Solo while making *Return Of The Jedi*. With *The Force Awakens*, he finally got his way. Or did he? The smuggler's fate seems pretty definitive — stabbed through the chest with a lightsaber (by his son, no less), he then falls into an abyss at Starkiller Base, which *then* becomes a new sun. Han isn't Force-sensitive, either, which rules out a reappearance as a ghost. But never rule out the man who did the Kessel Run in less than 12 parsecs.

4 What's Luke Skywalker actually up to?
Has he been standing on a clifftop in

Rey rests on Jakku. But who is she really? Rian Johnson could provide the answers.





Ireland (or Anch-To, to give the planet its actual name) for decades? Or has he, as Han intimates, been searching for the first Jedi Temple, which presumably holds clues to defeating the First Order?

5 How did Maz Kanata get Luke's lightsaber?

When Maz Kanata hands Rey Luke Skywalker's lightsaber, it's the first time we've seen it since it was cut off, along with Luke's hand, in *The Empire Strikes Back*. Where has it been in the 30-odd years since? Maz tells Han that it's a tale for another time. Now would be good.

6 What's the significance of Vader's helmet?

An early iteration of the film would have seen Kylo Ren converse with the Force Ghost of Darth Vader, instead of Vader's burned-out helmet. Plans were tabled to have Hayden Christensen return as Vader/Anakin Skywalker. Are we not quite done with the Dark Lord of the Sith?

7 Who are the Knights of Ren?

We see them briefly in Rey's vision — seven figures led by Kylo Ren. When Han explains that Luke was betrayed by Kylo Ren — or Ben Solo, as we now know him — he doesn't say that Kylo killed all of Luke's fledgling Jedi. Could Ren have turned them instead? And might Benicio del Toro — who signed on to *Episode VIII* a while ago — be a Knight who says Ren?

8 Did Captain Phasma make it?

Gwendoline Christie's chrometrooper was heading for the trash compactor, last we heard. Given that Starkiller Base blew up soon after, have we seen the last of her?

***STAR WARS EPISODE VIII* IS OUT ON MAY 26, 2017.**

Top: Supreme Leader Snoke: a giant, or just really close to the camera? **Above:** Maz Kanata, the Lovejoy of lightsabers...



Kevin Spacey and Dana Brunetti have been appointed heads of the renascent Relativity Media. Good luck swimming with sharks, Kev!



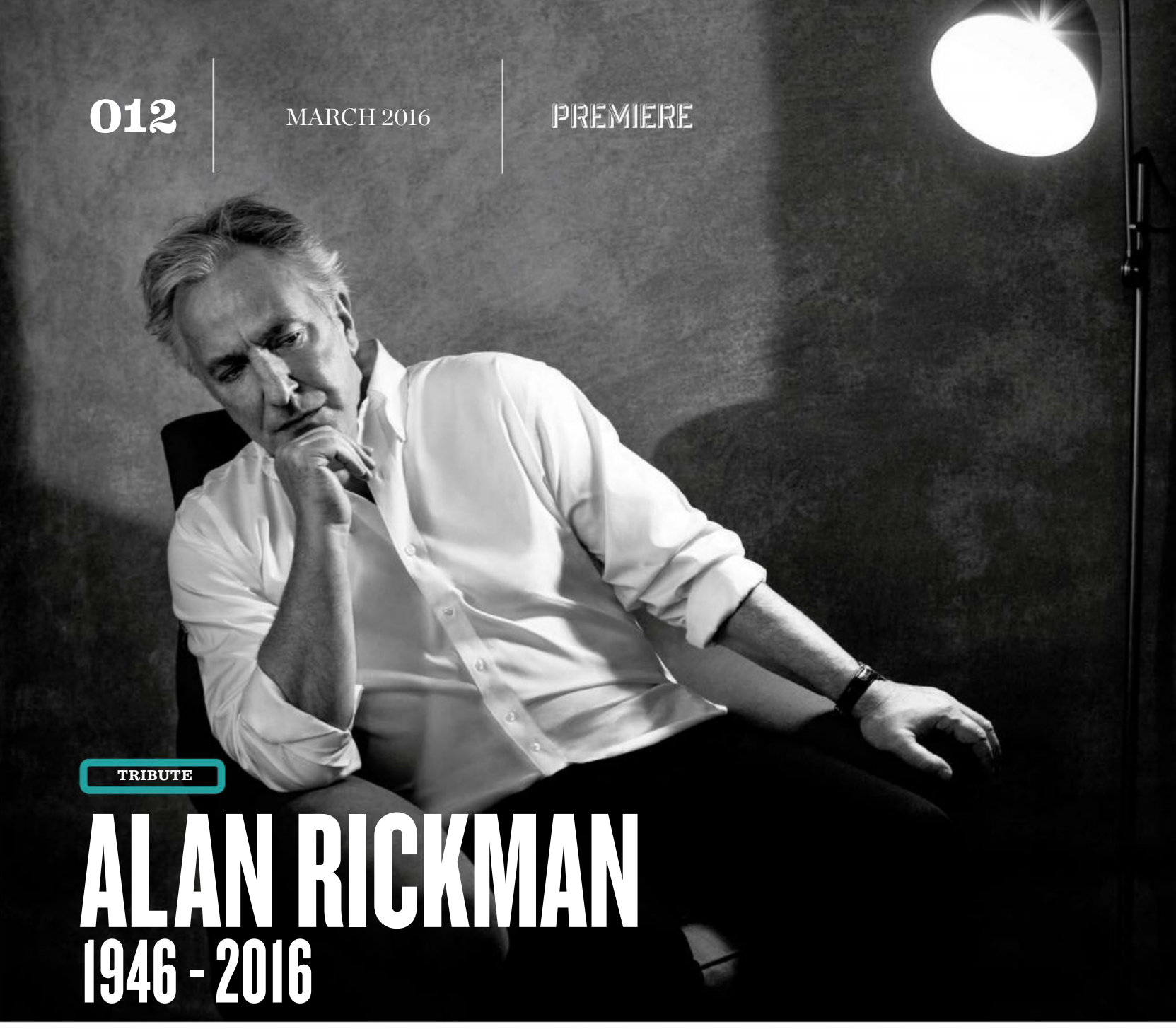
Emma Stone is in talks to play a young Cruella de Vil in a live-action *101 Dalmatians* prequel. *1 Dalmatian*, anyone?



Guillermo del Toro and James Cameron will shrink themselves down to direct and produce the remake of *Fantastic Voyage*.



Christopher Nolan will tackle *Dunkirk*, one of the pivotal events of World War II, for his next movie, due 2017. Should be epic.



TRIBUTE

ALAN RICKMAN
1946 - 2016

EMPIRE PAYS TRIBUTE TO THE MUCH-LOVED BRITISH ACTOR/DIRECTOR

THERE WAS MUCH more to Alan Rickman, of course, than being a bad guy. But then, in his first movie — the very first time he set foot on a movie set — he delivered Hans Gruber, one of the greatest screen villains of all time, so that's where we have to start.

Rickman was in his early forties when he made *Die Hard*. He wasn't exactly a late bloomer — Rickman was one of the most celebrated stage actors in Britain, his hooded gaze and slow-motion voice a combination fit to send anyone weak at the knees. But he and cinema had somehow avoided each other, until John McTiernan needed a foil for Bruce Willis. He got more than he bargained for: an actor of incredible range, depth and intelligence, who furnished his German terrorist with so much suavity, sophistican and goddamn cool that he very nearly spirited the movie away from Willis, and set the template for a decade or more of rent-a-Brit bad guys.

Rickman tried to resist the lure of the dark side throughout his career — he was warm and likable as a ghost in Anthony Minghella's *Truly Madly Deeply*, and excellent at playing pompous prigs just waiting for their comeuppance, as evidenced in Richard Curtis' *Love Actually*. He also enjoyed taking the piss out of his ultra-serious persona. See *Galaxy Quest*, and his vainglorious Shakespearean actor Alexander Dane, for details.

But, in a career where he directed (most recently 2014's *A Little Chaos*), dazzled on stage and fought the good fight for serious social issues, it all came back to on-screen villainy. It had to — it would have been a shame to waste a world-class sneer like that.

So, as well as *Die Hard* and Gruber, there was his amazing, BAFTA-winning turn as the Sheriff Of Nottingham in *Robin Hood: Prince Of Thieves*, calling off Christmas and threatening to cut people's hearts out with a spoon. He so artfully half-inched the movie from Kevin Costner that there seemed no doubt who the real prince of thieves was.

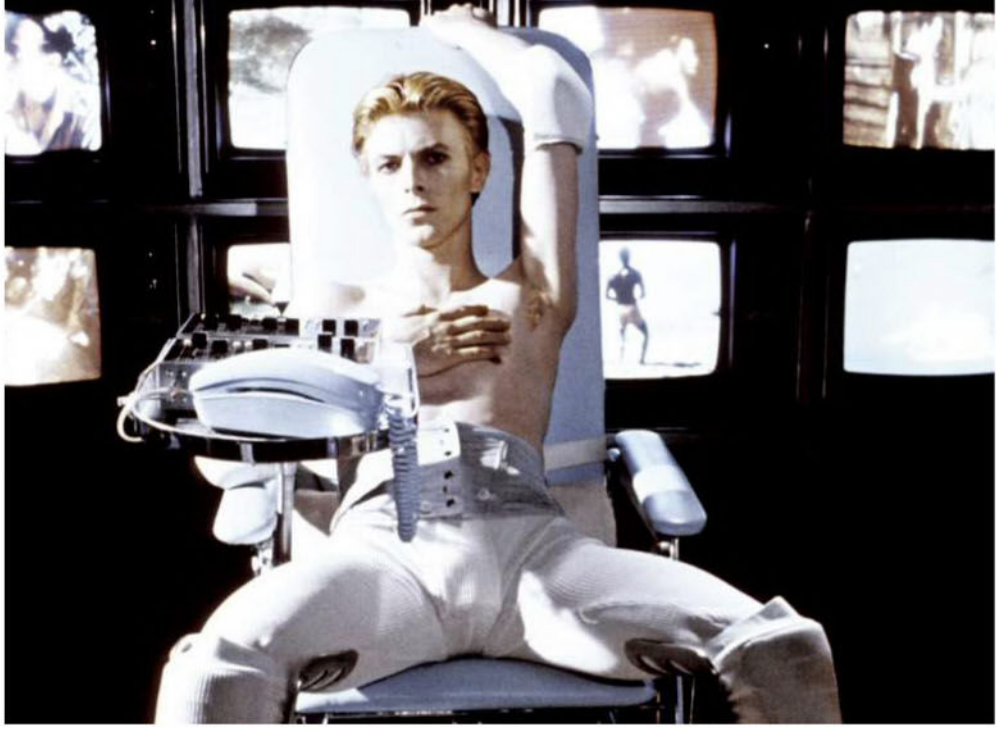
And then there was Snape. Severus Snape, the Defence Against The Dark Arts teacher who spent seven movies

Alan Rickman, photographed exclusively for *Empire* at The Soho Hotel, London, on January 27, 2015.

• SARAH DUNN

being the very worst thing in Harry Potter's world, before a final redemptive act restored the character's humanity in the eighth. Rickman was good at that, lending bad men grace. There's a moment in *Die Hard* — yes, we're back to Gruber again — when Hans is winning. He's unlocked the vault containing the millions he's come to steal, and he stares at it in wonder, a beatific smile on his face. And you realise, to your astonishment, that you're happy for this cold-blooded bastard. You want him to get away with it, to be sitting on a beach, earning 20 per cent.

That was Rickman's genius. When he died, aged just 69, in January from a long battle with cancer, it felt like the end of an era. Now we have nobody to root for but the heroes. How boring is that? CH



DAVID BOWIE 1947 - 2016

EMPIRE ON THE ENDURING CINEMATIC LEGACY OF THE MUSIC LEGEND, WHO DIED IN JANUARY

JOHN CUSACK'S Martin Q. Blank stares into the chubby face of a baby and has an epiphany as *Under Pressure* builds and builds. Mélanie Laurent gets ready to kill Nazis aplenty while *Cat People (Putting Out Fire)* slinks across the soundtrack. The Guardians Of The Galaxy encounter a giant floating skull in space while *Moonage Daydream* fizzes into life.

The movies loved David Bowie, alright. And the feeling was decidedly mutual. Not only did Bowie's astonishing, vibrant, inventive back catalogue lend life to countless films across the last four decades (most recently, *Starman* — and not the rather more on-the-nose *Life On Mars?* — soundtracked Matt Damon's attempts to stay alive in *The Martian*), but the man who had more aliases than Jason Bourne was that rarest of things: a pop star who could really, seriously act.

He started out as a leading man, that rail-thin, androgynous Thin White Duke quality lending itself perfectly to his debut as an alien in Nic Roeg's mysterious *The Man Who Fell To Earth* (1976). Bowie would later admit that he was using cocaine heavily during filming — perhaps that helped produce that sense of desperation that fuels his performance. Perhaps he was just playing himself.

Above: David Bowie, typically challenging in his first film, 1976's *The Man Who Fell To Earth*. **Below:** As the Goblin King in *Labyrinth* (1986).



He was a musician and a rock star first and foremost, so his screen-acting credits remain few and far between. The less successful *Just A Gigolo* followed in 1978, while he popped up as himself in 1981's *Christiane F.*, just the first of several occasions on which Bowie would play a version of himself (the last was forgettable Vanessa Hudgens comedy *Bandslam* in 2009).

His last proper lead came in 1983's poignant World War II prisoner-of-war drama, *Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence*, which came his way after Nagisa Oshima, the director, saw him as John Merrick in a Broadway production of *The Elephant Man*. But he also made his mark in a series of eye-catching cameos and supporting roles. There was Pontius Pilate in *The Last Temptation Of Christ* (1988), Andy Warhol (whom Bowie knew) in *Basquiat* (1996), and Jareth, the big-haired Goblin King, in Jim Henson's *Labyrinth* (1986). There was the detached cool of his vampire (Bowie as a vampire is so perfect it's a wonder it happened only once) in Tony Scott's *The Hunger* (1983). And a bonkers, none-more-Bowie appearance as an otherworldly Fed in *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* (1992). Bowie worked with some of the greats — Scorsese, Lynch, Tony Scott, John Landis, Christopher Nolan, Julian Schnabel — on the small screen he showed further excellent taste with his wry cameo (as himself, natch) in *Extras*, singing *Little Fat Man* to Ricky Gervais. Yet his greatest cinematic legacy may be his son — Duncan Jones, the gifted director of *Moon*, *Source Code* and the forthcoming *Warcraft*.

His last major appearance was in 2006's *The Prestige*, as Nikola Tesla — a pioneer playing a pioneer. Which just about sums it up. CH



A village elder prepares for lunch in *The Green Inferno*.

EXCLUSIVE

ELI ROTH'S CANNIBAL HORRORCAUST

THE HORROR MAESTRO ON THE MOVIES THAT SHAPED *THE GREEN INFERNO*



THE END CREDITS of Eli Roth's blood-spattered cannibal movie, *The Green Inferno*, which is finally getting a UK release almost 18 months after it debuted at the Edinburgh Film Festival, include a list of the Italian cannibal movies that influenced him. Here exclusively for *Empire*, Roth expands on those films, and his love for a subgenre that boasts "amazing works of cinema, the kind of psychotic gonzo filmmaking that you only hear stories about in Werner Herzog documentaries."

Man From Deep River

YEAR: **1972.** DIRECTOR: **UMBERTO LENZI**

"Lenzi accidentally started the cannibal subgenre with this classic "re-imagining" of *A Man Called Horse*. Okay, they pretty much just ripped it off, but in the film there was a scene of cannibalism that was so shocking the producers came to Lenzi and asked him to make an entire movie with cannibals, which was called..."

The Last Cannibal World

YEAR: **1977.** DIRECTOR: **RUGGERO DEODATO**

"But Lenzi declined, and the project went to the great Ruggero Deodato. Deodato learned from the master of Italian neorealism, Roberto Rossellini, and the pioneer of onscreen violence with political subtext, Sergio Corbucci. He took that realism and combined it with violence to create a fantastic cannibal film."



Ruggero Deodato's *The Last Cannibal World.*



Peckish during *Cannibal Holocaust*? Try a light snack.



The lurid poster for *Massacre In Dinosaur Valley*. Note the alternative title.

Emanuelle And The Last Cannibals

YEAR: **1977.** DIRECTOR: **JOE D'AMATO**

"What's better than a cannibal movie, you ask? Why, combining one with the Italian *Emmanuelle* series (*erotic film franchise*), starring the great Laura Gemser. It's actually an amazing *Emmanuelle* film as well as a cannibal movie. The ending is pretty spectacular."

Mountain Of The Cannibal God

YEAR: **1978.** DIRECTOR: **SERGIO MARTINO**

"Martino is a spectacular director — stylish, innovative, and ballsy as hell. He shot this film in Sri Lanka, and once a week a small plane would pick up the film and drop off fresh rolls for the week. It was a very dangerous shoot and you see it in the footage — they really climbed the mountain. More an adventure film than a cannibal movie, this is a fun one that's often overshadowed by more excessively violent cousins in the subgenre."

Cannibal Holocaust

YEAR: **1980.** DIRECTOR: **RUGGERO DEODATO**

"Known as "the mother of all cannibal films", this movie was so innovative and brilliant it started the "found footage" genre. It was banned in dozens of countries, and Deodato was actually brought up on murder charges. He'd got the actors to agree to disappear for an entire year and had to fly them to Rome to prove they were alive. The infamous image of the girl impaled on a pole was so shocking he had to bring out the Columbian crew member who played the part to prove that it was make-up. It's still unmatched to this day."

Massacre In Dinosaur Valley

YEAR: **1985.** DIRECTOR: **MICHELE MASSIMO TARANTINI AKA MICHAEL E. LEMICK**

"I had actually never seen this until a few months ago. And why would I? It's called *Massacre In Dinosaur Valley* — why would I ever think it has anything to do with cannibals? Well, it does, and it has many of the tropes I used in *The Green Inferno*, such as the plane crash and the girls being brought before the village elder after they're painted, ready to be put through some tribal ritual. It's a totally bonkers movie, worth tracking down, and one that marked the end of the dear Italian cannibal subgenre."

***THE GREEN INFERNO* IS OUT ON FEBRUARY 12.**



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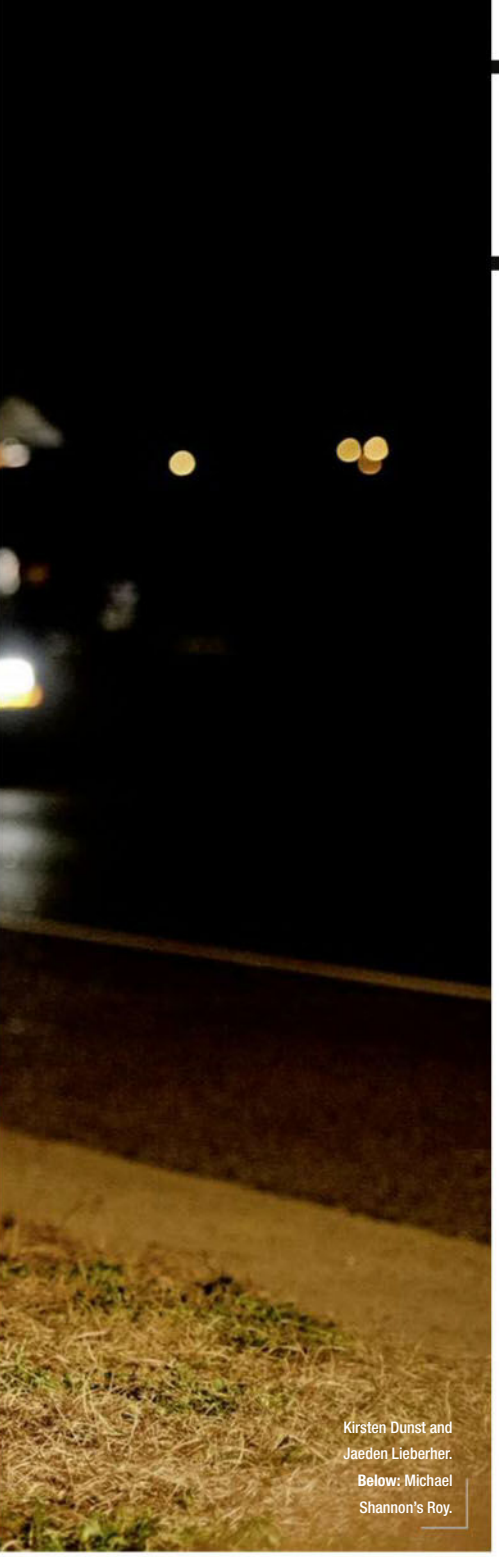
THE DIRECTOR OF *MUD* TAKES AN UNEXPECTED TURN INTO SCI-FI THRILLER TERRITORY

WHEN JEFF NICHOLS announced that his fourth film, after three dramas set in the South, would be a sci-fi thriller, eyebrows were raised. The story of a little boy with special powers who is pursued by the government, it sounded like a risky departure for a director with three solid titles to his name. Thankfully, *Midnight Special* — a "mood" title, borrowed from an old song covered by the likes of Van Morrison and Creedence Clearwater Revival — not only looks likely to be his biggest hit to date, it also sits comfortably with the thoughtful, nuanced likes of *Shotgun Stories*, *Take Shelter* and *Mud*. "Much to the chagrin of the studio," laughs the director, "it's still very much a Jeff Nichols film."

Though the film does indeed feature a kind of pre-teen X-Man, who is being hunted by the government after leaving a tight-knit religious community, *Midnight Special* focuses more on the human than the superhuman, unfolding through the eyes of Nichols regular Michael Shannon as the boy's estranged father, Roy, who has taken his son on the run.

"When I wrote it," Nichols explains, "my son had been born and I was coming to terms with the realities of being a father. That all went into the film. On the one hand, you have my love for those 1980s sci-fi films and wanting to do a chase film through the contemporary South, all at night, with fast cars and high tension — one that has the aesthetic of *E.T.*, *Close Encounters* and John Carpenter's *Starman*. That's all the fun film-nerd stuff.



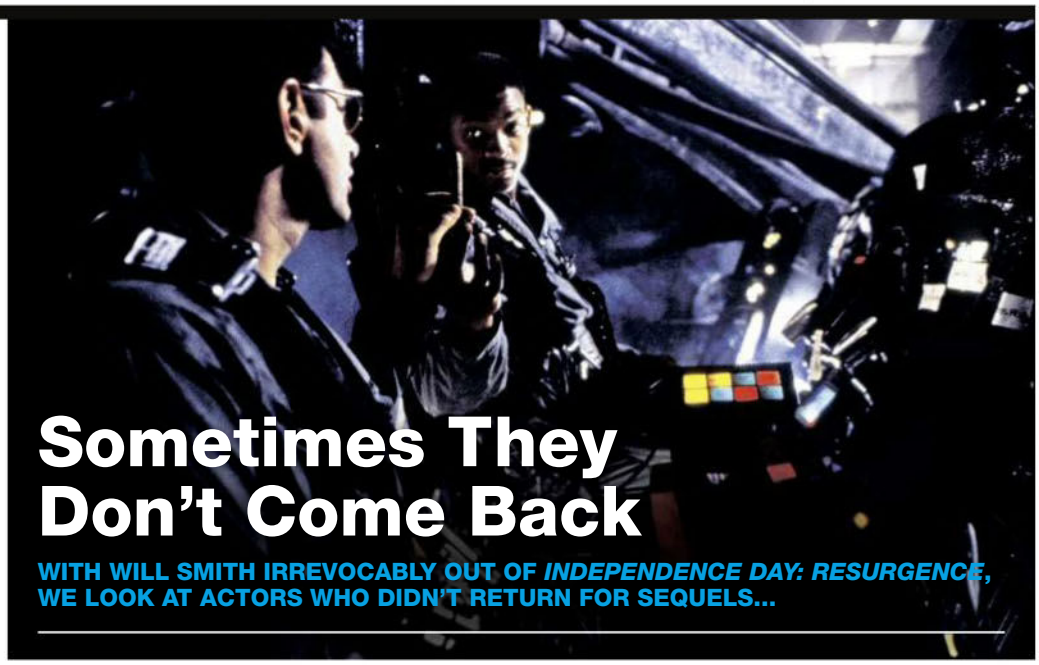


Kirsten Dunst and Jaeden Lieberher. Below: Michael Shannon's Roy.

And on the other, it really is about me trying to figure out what it feels like to be a father."

To say more would rob the film of its many mysteries, carefully rationed to make the film a "unique experience" for viewers. But for Nichols, it's the culmination of a long experiment. "Which is: how much expositional information can you remove and still have a story? And to be honest, it's an experiment that I don't know is entirely successful. But I'm *amazed* they let me do it!" **DAMON WISE**

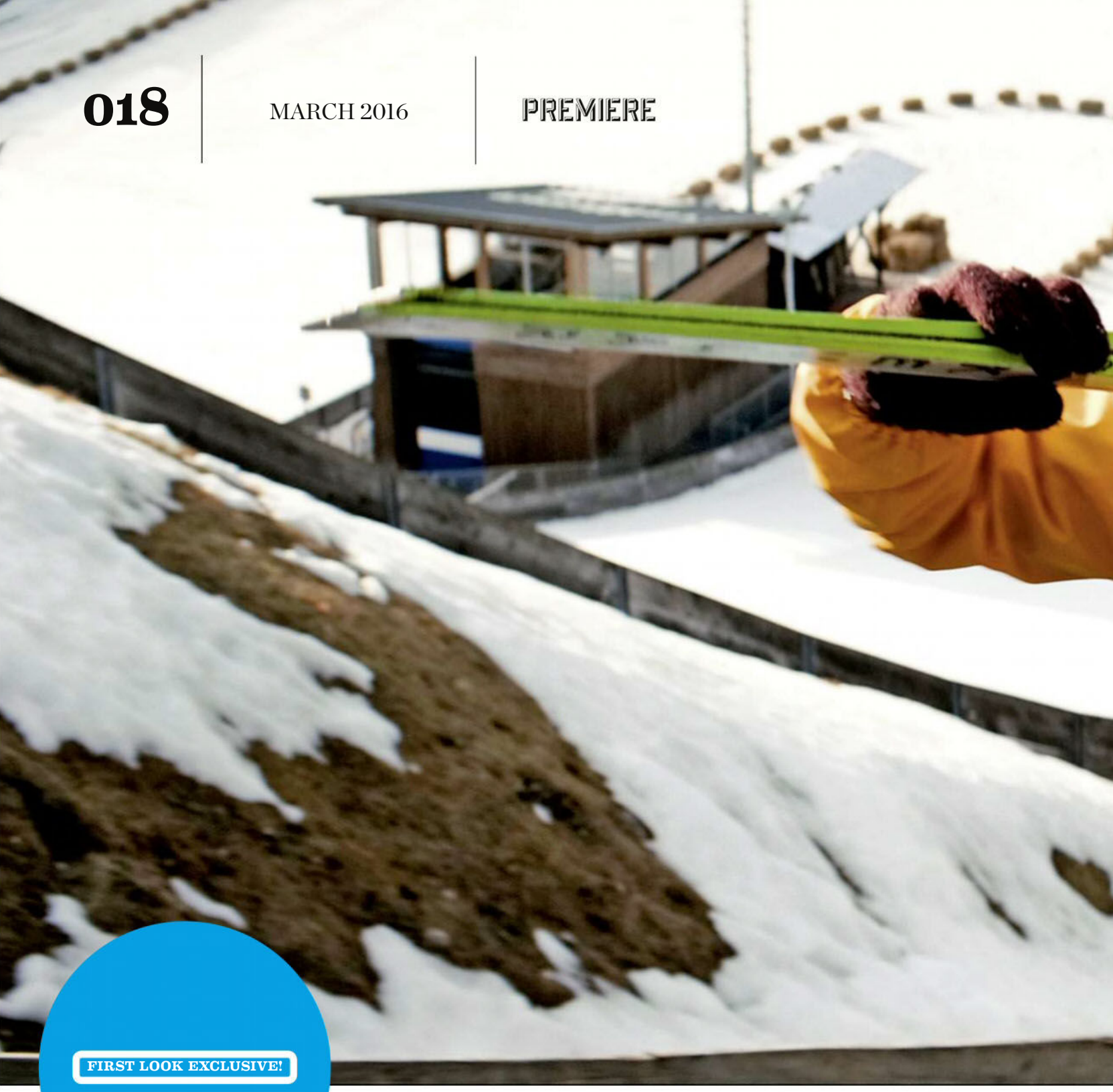
***MIDNIGHT SPECIAL* IS OUT ON APRIL 15.**



Sometimes They Don't Come Back

WITH WILL SMITH IRREVOCABLY OUT OF *INDEPENDENCE DAY: RESURGENCE*, WE LOOK AT ACTORS WHO DIDN'T RETURN FOR SEQUELS...

ACTOR	LAST SEEN	NOT SEEN IN	REASON?	REAL REASON?
 WILL SMITH	Saving the world in *Independence Day.*	 INDEPENDENCE DAY: RESURGENCE	The *Independence Day* website says he was killed in 2007, while testing an alien/human hybrid fighter plane.	Smith chose to do *Suicide Squad* instead.
 MEGAN FOX	Dissing Decepticons in *Transformers: Revenge Of The Fallen.*	 TRANSFORMERS: DARK OF THE MOON	She's dumped Shia LaBeouf's Sam in-between movies, leading one character to dismiss her as "mean". Harsh.	Fox left the franchise after comparing Michael Bay to Hitler in an interview. But he's since cast her in *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.* Harsher.
 ROBERT DUVALL	Offering counsel in *The Godfather Part II.*	 THE GODFATHER PART III	Tom, Michael Corleone's *consigliere*, dies before the film begins. No cause of death is ever given.	Duvall chose not to return due to a dispute over salary. Francis Ford Coppola has since expressed regret over the character's absence.
 MARLON BRANDO	Dispensing wisdom from beyond the supergrave in *Superman: The Movie.*	 SUPERMAN II	None. The hologram of Brando that advises Superman is replaced by a hologram of his wife, Susannah York's Lara.	After producers refused to pay him the same percentage as he'd had on the first movie, Brando denied permission to use the footage he'd shot.
 VIN DIESEL	Killing bad guys in an ultra-gnarly fashion in *xXx.*	 XXX: THE NEXT LEVEL	The extreme sports-loving secret agent is bumped off off-screen while on assignment in Bora Bora. At least he died happy.	Weirdly, Diesel is about to play Cage once again in *xXx: The Return Of Xander Cage.* He's alive! He's alive!
 CRISPIN GLOVER	Embracing his density in *Back To The Future.*	 BACK TO THE FUTURE PART II	None. George is instead played, briefly, by another actor (Jeffrey Weissman).	Glover's story for not making the movie has changed over the years. Either way, he sued the production for using his likeness, and won.



FIRST LOOK EXCLUSIVE!

THE EAGLE IS LANDING

TARON EGERTON TAKES ON A NATIONAL HERO

MICHAEL 'EDDIE' EDWARDS. THE MAN they call 'The Eagle'. The no-hoper who overcame the odds, a lack of training and an absence of athletic ability to become Britain's first, only, and greatest ski jumper at the Calgary Winter Olympics in 1988. He became front-page news, a sporting legend, a national treasure. You must remember him. Everyone remembers him.

Except for Taron Egerton. He may play The Eagle in Dexter Fletcher's forthcoming film, but he doesn't remember Eddie at all. Although he has a good excuse.

"It was the year before I was born," says the 26 year-old actor, who first heard of Eddie from the





Above: Taron Egerton as Eddie Edwards. Left: Hugh Jackman as Bronson Peary.

film's producer, Matthew Vaughn. "The first thing Matthew said when he called — he never says hello — was, 'Taron, what do you know about Eddie The Eagle?' I said, the guy who used to jump over canyons on a bike? 'No, that's Evel Knievel. Bad start.'"

The last time Vaughn and Egerton worked together was on the ultra-violent, ultra-filthy spy caper *Kingsman: The Secret Service*. *Eddie The Eagle* promises to be a more innocent affair. No bum-sex jokes here — instead, Vaughn and director Dexter Fletcher are aiming to tell a charming, inspirational story about a very bumbling British hero.

"He's sweet and lovable and there's something about the way he wears his heart on his sleeve," says Egerton. "There are things about him that are heroic. I never wanted to make a film about an idiot. I have absolutely no interest in sending this guy up. He can be funny, he can have mishaps, but he needs heart and soul."

Much of that will come from the relationship between Eddie and his (fictional) coach, the hard-drinking, chain-smoking, all-American Bronson Peary, played by Hugh Jackman. "It's a feelgood buddy movie," adds Egerton. "Hugh and I are having a laugh, and I think that always translates. He's charming and self-effacing, and he makes me sick."

So, has Egerton been inspired by Jackman's presence to turn Eddie into a lean, mean fighting machine? Has he, in effect, absed up for the role? "Have I absed up?" he laughs. "Have I fuck!" Sounds like he's nailed it. CHRIS HEWITT

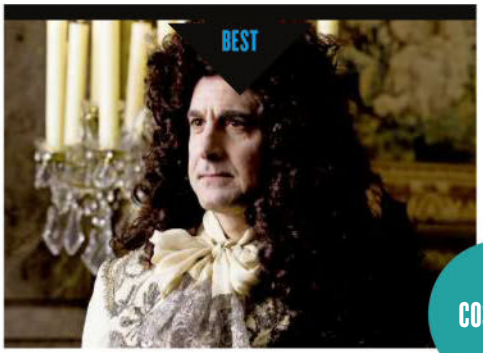
***EDDIE THE EAGLE* IS OUT ON APRIL 1.**

BEST OF TIMES/WORST OF TIMES

STANLEY TUCCI

TALKIN' TORN TIGHTS AND TOUGH AUDITIONS WITH THE TUCC

COSTUME





Any period film, like Alan Rickman's movie *A Little Chaos*. It's incredible looking, although if you have to use the restroom, that's half an hour gone. They should provide a valet.

A Midsummer Night's Dream for Michael Hoffman. I was playing Puck, and my tights kept ripping in the worst place. They were nylons, and [I had] some leafy things strapped onto a belt that went around my chest.

MOMENT



The Lovely Bones was really hard to do, so to be nominated (_for the Best Supporting Actor Oscar in 2010_) was great. My parents were able to be a part of it.



But the hard part was my first wife [Kate Tucci] passed away [afterwards]. All that positive stuff that happened, I wasn't able to share with her.

AUDITION

The best auditions are the ones they don't ask you to do — they just offer you the role. Thank God, I am at that level now. And when I audition actors, I am overly kind.

For Brian De Palma, for the role of Frank Nitti in *The Untouchables*. I read the lines and he looked at me like a shark looks at people and said, "Oooh, scary." I played Nitti in the end, but for Sam Mendes in *Road To Perdition*.

LOCATION

Everybody thought that shooting _Fortitude_ in Iceland was going to be difficult, but I loved it. I'd always wanted to go to Iceland.





Shooting in a cornfield in the middle of winter, in Pennsylvania at night, on _The Lovely Bones_. That was unpleasant on every level.

DIRECTION

"Do it again, and do it better." That was Herbert Ross, quite a few years ago (_on_ Undercover Blues). He was notoriously not a nice person, but he was nice to me. And that direction… he was right. I got what he meant.



It would be the same! "Do it again, and do it better." A very good cause, but a bad direction. HOH

***SPOTLIGHT* IS OUT ON JANUARY 29.**

THINGS WE'VE LEARNED



Gillian Anderson has co-written two sci-fi novels, _A Vision Of Fire_ and _A Dream Of Ice_. The truth is in there. Page 26, to be precise.



A little slice of London film history is no more. The legendary Cinema Store closed its doors late January. It shall be missed.



Corin Hardy, director of _The Crow_ reboot, listens to the _Empire_ podcast while in the bath. Steady now.



Elvis Presley once wrote a treatment for a karate movie called _The New Gladiators_.

4x4 OF THE YEAR 2016 4x4 MAGAZINE

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ON-SET EXCLUSIVE!

BUTLER HAS RISEN

ON SET WITH THE STAR OF *LONDON HAS FALLEN*

PHOTOGRAPHY **CHARLIE GRAY**

WE'D HEARD THAT GERARD BUTLER HAD a big chopper, but this is ridiculous.

It's a blustery Sunday in March, and Butler has had quite the day of it shooting *London Has Fallen*. He started off by accidentally driving onto the set of *Spectre*, which is filming in the same area. Now he's ending it by landing a helicopter in London's historic Somerset House. Okay, he may not be piloting it, but he's definitely inside the Sikorsky S-76 as it glides over the courtyard of the glorious 18th-century building, the rotors whipping up a miniature hurricane so fierce that *Empire* has to duck inside for shelter. Then it lands and disgorges Butler, playing Secret Service badass Mike Banning, along with co-stars Aaron Eckhart (as President Benjamin Asher) and Angela Bassett (as Secret Service director Lynn Jacobs). They race to waiting SUVs, get in and speed off. Cut. Go again.

Olympus Has Fallen was the first of 2013's two 'Die Hard In The White House' movies. *White House Down* won the global box-office battle, but *Olympus Has Fallen* was crucially cheaper, which paved the way for a sequel, taking the action out of the States and onto the global stage. The story this time sees Banning and his politichums come to London for a state funeral. However, the whole thing is a trap laid by evil terrorist types, and only Banning, the one-man army, can stop them with his unique blend of bullets and bantz.

Olympus Has Fallen wasn't a barrel of laughs, but its standout moment came when Butler invited a terrorist to "play a game of Fuck Off. You go first". "The funny thing is, I was sent that by text," laughs Butler. "I was like, 'How can we get this into the movie?' I'm always nicking stuff."

For *London Has Fallen*, Butler — as star and producer — is heavily involved in developing Banning's GSOH. "There's one [bit] where we're about to be attacked and I put the President in a cupboard," he says. "There's one guy left and the President pops out and clubs him. And as I push the body off he's standing there and I go, 'It's about time you came out of the closet!'" Butler laughs. "Those moments are when you go, 'I fucking love this!' I can't believe my job involves putting Presidents in cupboards." Well, it's a living. **CHRIS HEWITT**

***LONDON HAS FALLEN* IS OUT ON MARCH 4.**



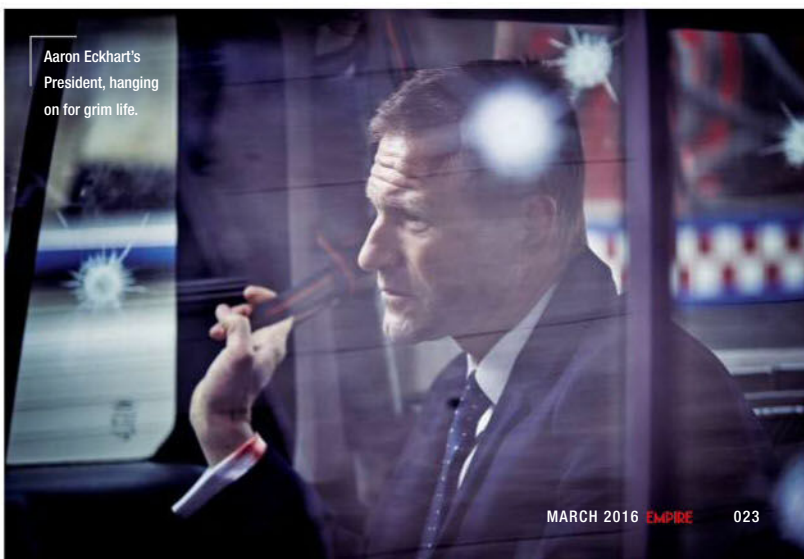
This! Is! A really quite lovely part of London! Gerard Butler on set.



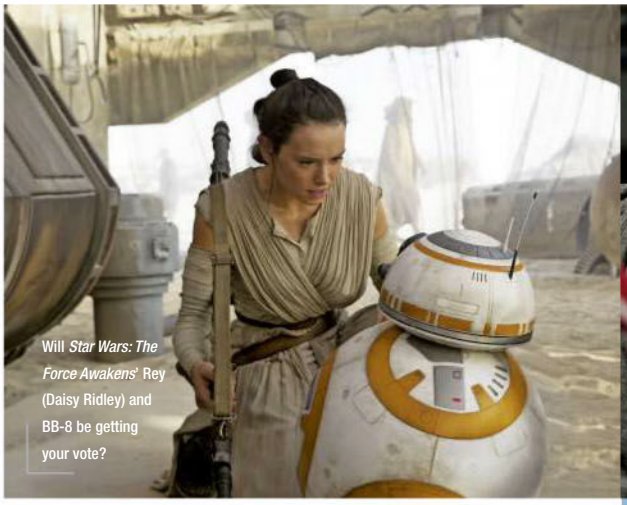
Gerry is the Star In A Completely Battered Car.



Angela Bassett's Lynn Jacobs. Seatbelt, Lynn.



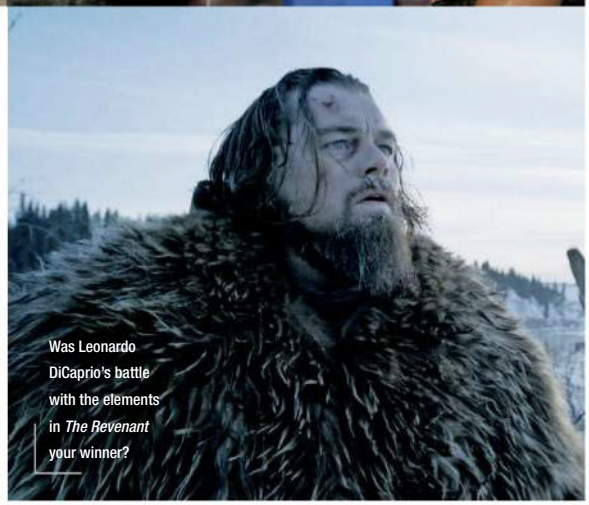
Aaron Eckhart's President, hanging on for grim life.



Will *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*' Rey (Daisy Ridley) and BB-8 be getting your vote?



Has *Creed* fought its way into your affections?



Was Leonardo DiCaprio's battle with the elements in *The Revenant* your winner?

JAMESON® EMPIRE AWARDS 2016

OUT OF TIME

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UNLESS YOU'RE THE DOCTOR, OR HAPPEN to have a DeLorean knocking around, time is linear. And, when it comes to the Jameson Empire Awards 2016, it's fast running out.

February 12 — that's the deadline for the first round of nominations for this year's Awards (the next round, voting on the shortlist, begins on February 18). Simply log on to **empireonline.com/awards** to cast your vote in the categories to the right.

A reminder: any film released in the UK between January 31, 2015 and January 31, 2016 is eligible. As an added incentive, one lucky participant will be chosen at random and win a pair of tickets to the most irreverent awards show on the movie calendar, to be held at a top London venue on March 20.

JAMESON · Absolute Radio · CORINTHIA HOTEL LONDON · Hollywood Reporter

THE CATEGORIES

BEST FILM

BEST MALE NEWCOMER

BEST FEMALE NEWCOMER

BEST SCI-FI/FANTASY

BEST HORROR

BEST COMEDY
PRESENTED BY ABSOLUTE RADIO

BEST BRITISH FILM

JAMESON BEST ACTOR

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BEST SCREENPLAY

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BEST THRILLER
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BEST DOCUMENTARY

BEST SOUNDTRACK

BEST COSTUME DESIGN

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BEST VISUAL EFFECTS

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JAMESON EMPIRE DONE IN 60 SECONDS

DONE DEAL

→ As one door closes, another… also closes. This year's Jameson Empire Done In 60 Seconds, the contest that challenges you to remake any film you like in just one minute, is no longer taking entries. But you can still help us to select the winners. The top 20 entries from the UK are now available to watch online — go on, check them out, and then cast your votes for your favourites.

The directors of the five most popular videos will be invited to this year's Jameson Empire Awards, where they will rub shoulders with the film world's A-listers, before one of them will nab the ultimate prize.

WATCH THIS YEAR'S FINEST ENTRIES AT JAMESONEMPIREDISS.COM.



A new collection of Star Wars timepieces
and cuff links by Devon. © Lucasfilm Ltd.

DEVON

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FIRST LOOK EXCLUSIVE!

ATTACK OF THE DRONES

HELEN MIRREN IS WATCHING YOU IN *EYE IN THE SKY*

IT'S A GLORIOUS day in Cape Town (doubling for a country road in Hertfordshire), and Helen Mirren's Colonel Katherine Powell is driving a Range Rover and making a momentous decision over a speakerphone: "Simon," she tells her husband. "I will not have the boys bringing friends home for the night without asking me."

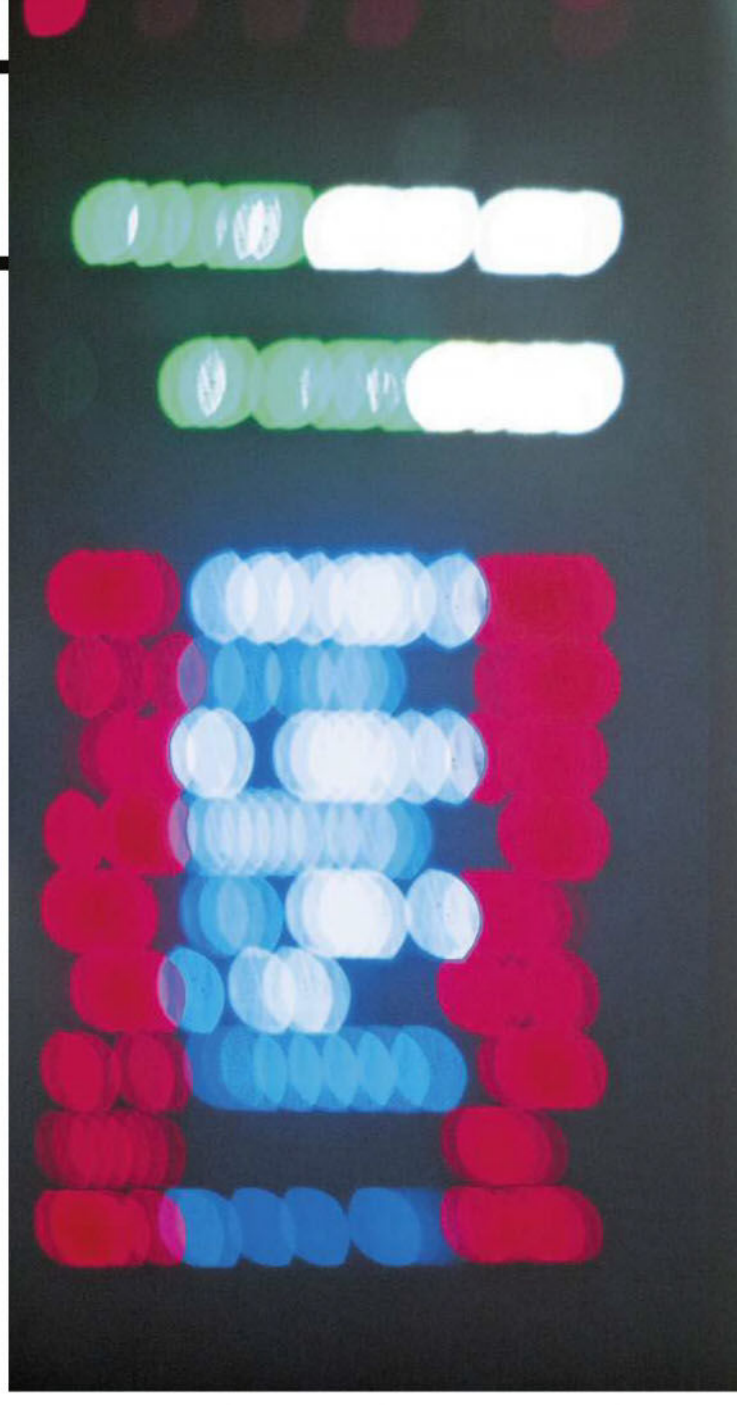
Okay, so that's not momentous. But the rest of Gavin Hood's thriller, *Eye In The Sky*, will see Powell agonising over a life-and-death call at a command centre miles — actually, continents — away from where any blood will be spilt. "She's running operations — pretty secretive operations involving drone warfare," says Mirren, "And what our film investigates is the moral issues surrounding an operation like that. It's a great script about war, but unlike any I've ever seen. One's seen so many films about war: the devastation of war, the chaos of war, the terrible price that is paid. But this investigates, in almost second-by-second detail, the kinds of moral decisions you have to make."

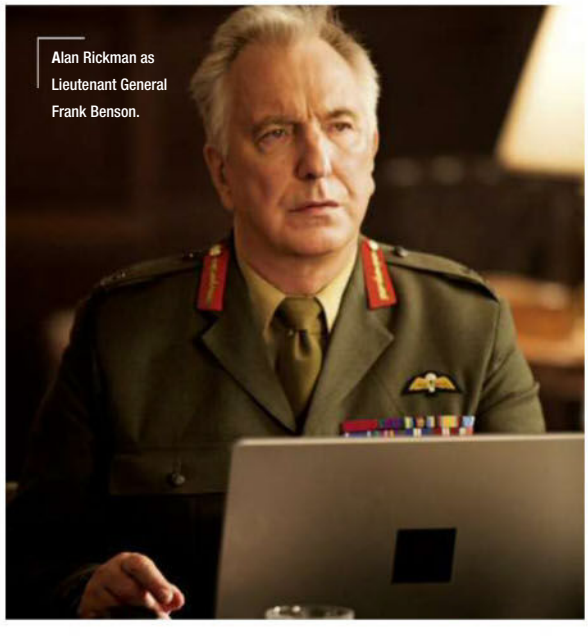
Eye In The Sky aims to show how such decisions affect the lives of those on the ground, and also those at the controls. The potential drone strike, which will target a suspected terrorist, possibly at the cost of civilian lives, is in Kenya. Mirren's colonel is in Britain, while the late, great Alan Rickman deals with politicians in Whitehall. Then there's Aaron Paul as the drone pilot — who may be required to press the button that blitzes civilians — at his base in Nevada.

Back at a studio in Cape Town, Paul sits at the controls of what looks like something from an arcade. He is piloting The Reaper, "looking through the eye in the sky", at those purported terrorists. "I was talking to the military advisor about this," says Paul. "He was saying, 'We hate it when they call drones unmanned — they're not unmanned. Someone's controlling them, it's just they're not physically inside the aircraft.' I think at first when anyone hears about drones the instinct is to say, 'No, that's wrong.' But this allowed me to peek behind the curtain, see what that world is all about."

The film — the first from Colin Firth's production company, Raindog Productions, and the inaugural venture into production from British distributors Entertainment One — could not be a more timely, or troubling, look at what happens when the click of a button can bring carnage. This is warfare 21st-century style, for the *Call Of Duty* generation. "It's not a game," cautions Mirren. "It is absolutely not a game." NEV PIERCE

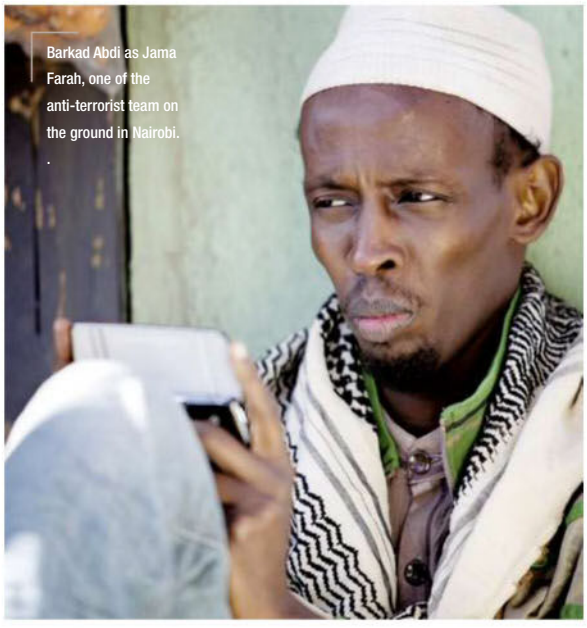
***EYE IN THE SKY* IS OUT ON APRIL 8.**





Alan Rickman as Lieutenant General Frank Benson.

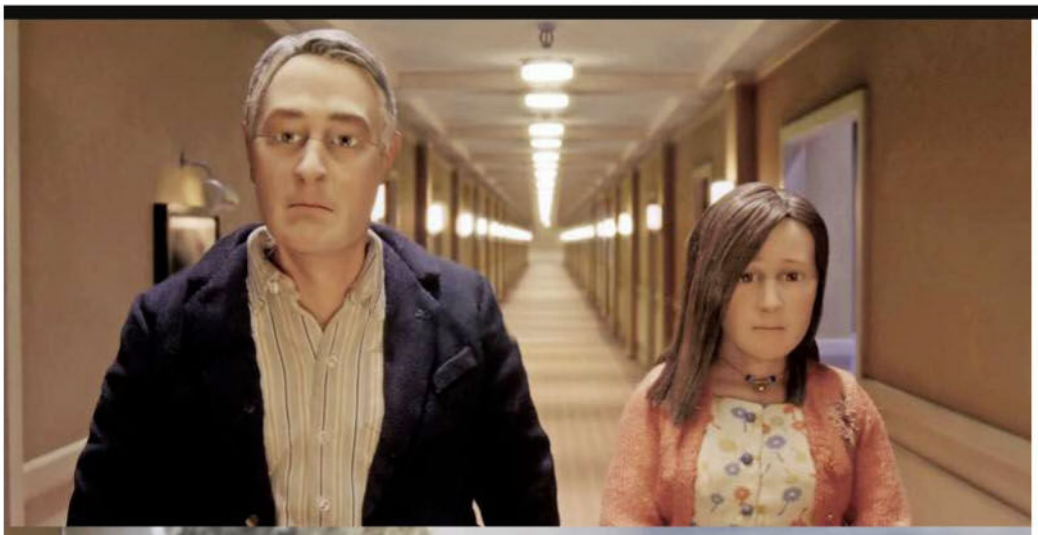
Helen Mirren's Colonel Katherine Powell considers a life-or-death decision in *Eye In The Sky*.



Barkad Abdi as Jama Farah, one of the anti-terrorist team on the ground in Nairobi.
.



Mirren on set with director Gavin Hood.



FIRST LOOK EXCLUSIVE!

PUPPET MASTER

CHARLIE KAUFMAN IS BACK. AND WEIRDER THAN EVER

ANOMALISA IS a film about a man so disconnected from society that everyone he meets looks and sounds exactly the same. And it just happens to be told entirely with stop-motion figures, voiced by three actors. It could only come from the King Of Weird, Charlie Kaufman.

It seems natural that Kaufman eventually gravitated towards animation (or, if you will, Kaufmanimation). As a writer (*Eternal Sunshine Of The Spotless Mind*, *Being John Malkovich*) and director (*Synecdoche, New York*) his ideas have always had a fantastical, cartoonish quality, using absurdist gimmicks to explore sincere emotion. Yet *Anomalisa* didn't start out that way.

"It was conceived as the opposite of an animation," says Kaufman. "It was conceived as something called a 'sound play'." *Anomalisa* started life in 2005 as an experimental piece, performed by the film's cast, David Thewlis, Jennifer Jason Leigh and Tom Noonan, in a project called *Theater Of The New Ear*. Almost a decade later, the script wound up with Duke Johnson, who directed stop-motion *Community* episode *Abed's Uncontrollable Christmas*. "I loved it and approached Charlie," says Johnson. "He said that if we could get the money to do it, then we'd both direct it."

The movie is typified by its sex scene, which despite featuring no actual flesh is one of the most frank and real depictions you'll see, wobbling bellies, awkward limbs and all. "We wanted it to be emotional and intimate, not a joke of puppets having sex," explains Kaufman. The result, which took home the Grand Jury Prize in Venice, is deliberately artificial, warmly human, and unlike anything you've seen. A Charlie Kaufman film, then. OR

***ANOMALISA* IS OUT ON MARCH 11.**

David Thewlis (not Nicholas Lyndhurst) and Jennifer Jason Leigh — honest — in Charlie Kaufman's *Anomalisa*.

200 NOT OUT!

THE *EMPIRE* PODCAST IS GOING LIVE AGAIN



→ They said it wouldn't last much beyond 198 or 199 episodes, but the award-winning *Empire* Podcast is about to prove all the doubters wrong in spectacular style. Yes, our 200th episode is coming up faster than an X-wing piloted by Poe Dameron, and to celebrate we're going to record it LIVE on February 24 at the Prince Charles Cinema, London.

There will be terrible jokes. There will be incredible spot prizes. There will be amazing celebrity guests. And there will be the *Empire* Podcast team — Chris Hewitt, Helen O'Hara, Phil de Semlyen and more — podding their little hearts out for your entertainment.

Tickets cost just £10, and are available through princecharlescinema.com. And that, as we say on the pod, is a recommendation. Hope to see you there. And if you can't make it, an edited version will be made available that same week.




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GET READY FOR THE OSCARS AND THE BAFTAS WITH *EMPIRE*'S DRINKING GAMES

NEED HELP GETTING through the BAFTAs and the Oscars this month? We've come up with a drinking game for each to help you pass the time.

OSCARS During the red carpet pre-show, Ryan Seacrest asks someone, "Who are you wearing?" It's what, Ryan. WHAT. Unless you're Ed Gein.
DRINK: A FINGER OF WHISKY

BAFTAS It becomes apparent that the hapless YouTuber roped in to do red carpet interviews hasn't seen any films.
DRINK: A FINGER OF TETLEY

OSCARS The opening number is a lavish, celeb-heavy, FX-fuelled romp through the movies of the year. Spared no expense.
DRINK: A SIP OF WHITE WINE

BAFTAS There is no opening number. This is Britain. We don't do that kind of thing.
DRINK: A SIP OF SHLOER

OSCARS Host Chris Rock makes jokes about race in Hollywood. The camera cuts to white people in the audience, laughing nervously.
DRINK: A SWIG OF BEER

BAFTAS Host Stephen Fry makes jokes about fancying an A-list attendee. The camera cuts to A-list attendees in the audience, laughing nervously.
DRINK: A SWIG OF EARL GREY



OSCARS Chris Rock disses a famous actor. Sean Penn leaps onto the stage to defend that famous actor's honour.
DRINK: A BOTTLE OF BUD

BAFTAS Stephen Fry uses a word you've never heard of before. To the dictionary!
DRINK: A BOTTLE OF IRN-BRU

OSCARS The head of the Academy shows up for no good reason.
DRINK: A SHOT OF TEQUILA

BAFTAS LORD PUTTNAM KLAXON!
DRINK: A SHOT OF DANDELION AND BURDOCK

OSCARS The camera keeps cutting to Jack Nicholson, in his customary seat in the front row.
DRINK: A LONG ISLAND ICED TEA

BAFTAS The camera keeps cutting to the American movie star who travelled 5,500 miles, only to wind up empty-handed.
DRINK: AN ICED TEA

OSCARS Will Ferrell turns up dressed as the bear from *The Revenant* and makes googly eyes at Leonardo DiCaprio.
DRINK: A GLASS OF RED WINE

BAFTAS Rob Brydon shows up and does his Tom Jones impression.
DRINK: A GLASS OF RIBENA

OSCARS The In Memoriam section is soundtracked by Bette Midler or Barbra Streisand, doing Serious Face.
DRINK: A PO-FACED GLUG OF GUINNESS

BAFTAS Someone famous — it was Bob Hoskins last year — is left out of the In Memoriam section. Twitter goes absolutely mental.
DRINK: A SOLEMN GUZZLE OF STILL WATER

OSCARS Chris Rock makes a joke about stamina as the show heads into its fourth hour. Or is it the fifth hour? Hard to tell.
DRINK: VODKA AND RED BULL. ALL THE RED BULL

BAFTAS The show is pre-recorded and edited for broadcast, meaning it comes in at a tight two hours. Just enough time to head to the pub for closing time, then.
DRINK: EVERYTHING

THE BAFTAS TAKE PLACE ON FEBRUARY 14. THE OSCARS TAKE PLACE ON FEBRUARY 28. FOR FULL COVERAGE OF BOTH, GO TO EMPIREONLINE.COM

ILLUSTRATION
BILL McCONKEY



HOW MUCH IS A PINT OF MILK?

Lily James

Can you play a musical instrument? I can kind of play the guitar. I just went to Nashville and I bought a pink ukulele. I've just posed for pictures with it so far. I was in this incredible guitar shop and my friends, who are really musical and who were actually touring with a musical, were buying guitars, so I felt left out and bought a ukulele. I am going to learn.

How much is a pint of milk? I think it's 89p. Or 72p. It's less than a pound. There's a little corner shop right outside where I live, which is immensely convenient, because you never have to go anywhere. My boyfriend usually gets the milk because he makes the tea. I don't know if that's an excuse.

On a scale of one to ten, how famous are you? Four? I sometimes do ridiculously crazy things. I went to the Golden Globes on Sunday night, but I feel I'm not really at Globes level.

What's your favourite word? "Vibe". I also like "resilient". That's a good word.

Do you have tattoos? I don't. I've considered it so many times. I used to live in east London and every time I walked past a tattoo parlour, I used to go in and check out the fonts and look at the books. I've designed many tattoos I was going to have but I've never quite taken the plunge. I want to be totally sure.

Who were you in your first school play? I know this because my mum, for Christmas, gave me and my brothers all our old home videos transferred onto DVD so we can watch them. There's a video of me playing an angel with silver tinsel around my head, in what looks like a white sheet with holes cut out for arms. I look very, very shy. I was about four.

Is that where the bug first bit? Maybe it was that exact moment when I was singing with tinsel around my head. Sorry, my boyfriend just handed me a cup of tea and he genuinely thought I said, "I was singing with tits around my head!" (*laughs*) I wasn't!

What's your nickname? Lils. Or Lilsa. Or Lilsareenie. Variations on Lily. I like Lils. That's what my brothers call me.

When were you most starstruck? I had a little moment with Lady Gaga on Sunday night. We were backstage because I was presenting and she held onto me at one point, which was amazing. She held my shoulders. I just smiled. It was very surreal.

What would you do if you woke up tomorrow as Bruce Willis? I'd look under the covers at my penis.

Who was your first movie crush? Ryan Phillippe. He covered my bedroom walls. I didn't have proper posters of him, I made collages using Microsoft Word — an A4 sheet that was 15 tiny pictures of Ryan Phillippe. I really loved him.

There's a zombie apocalypse. What do you do? I just played Liz Bennet, so I'm clearly very knowledgeable about this matter. I wouldn't hide. With my incredible skills, I'd save the world.

Would you use your ukulele as a weapon? I would! I'd probably just play to the zombies and that would be enough. CHRIS HEWITT

***PRIDE + PREJUDICE + ZOMBIES* IS OUT ON FEBRUARY 11.**

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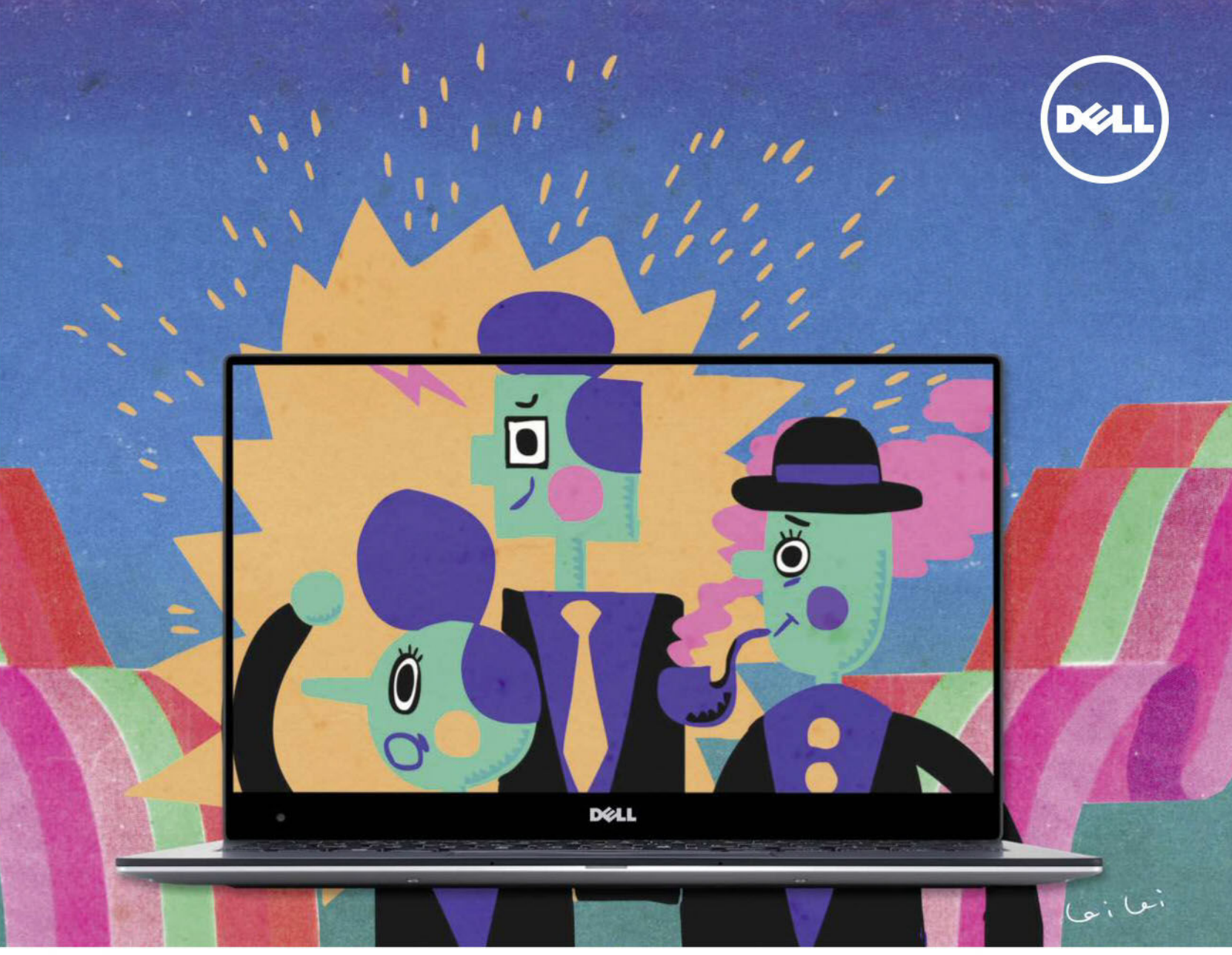
PORTRAIT **MATT HOLYOAK**

DID YOU KNOW?

- She is a distant cousin of George Bush.
- Her real name is Lily Thomson.
- She'll star in *Romeo & Juliet* for Kenneth Branagh in London this May.



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EVERY NEW MOVIE REVIEWED AND RATED | JANUARY 29 — FEBRUARY 26, 2016

EDITED *by* HELEN O'HARA

THE EMPIRE MOVIE GUIDE | UNMISSABLE ★★★★★ EXCELLENT ★★★★ GOOD ★★★ POOR ★★ TRAGIC ★



Spotlight

★★★★

OUT **JANUARY 29** / CERT. **15** / **129 MINS.**

DIRECTOR Thomas McCarthy
CAST Michael Keaton, Mark Ruffalo, Rachel McAdams, Liev Schreiber, Brian d'Arcy James, John Slattery, Stanley Tucci

PLOT *The Boston Globe*'s in-depth investigation team, known as Spotlight, are looking for a focus for their next project. At the suggestion of new editor Marty Baron (Schreiber) they embark on an investigation into the Catholic Church's child abuse scandals and reveal the horrifying scope of the cover-up.

THE WORD "ensemble" is often abused to refer to any film with more than one big-name star. Usually, there's still a lead, some glory-hound who demands attention. *Spotlight*, however, is the real thing, a supremely talented cast who subsume ego to tell a story of a group achievement. And despite that lack of conspicuous melodrama, this film communicates its high stakes so effectively that even photocopying seems unbearably tense.

It's 2001, and redundancies are nigh as new *Boston Globe* editor Marty Baron (Liev Schreiber) takes up his role. The paper's Spotlight team — who specialise in costly, long-running investigations — are particularly on edge. But Baron has a mission for them: he wants Spotlight



Tension builds for the Spotlight team as they delve deeper into the deceit.

to investigate claims that the Catholic hierarchy knew about child abuse by priests and covered it up for decades, allowing them to continue their crimes.

Given the primacy of the Church in Boston and the largely Catholic populace, the team are sceptical both of the idea that there was a cover-up and the financial wisdom in reporting it. Spotlight boss Walter 'Robby' Robinson (Michael Keaton) plays golf with half the town's bigwigs and attends charity dinners with the rest, and draws considerable ire from them. His reporters are Michael Rezendes (Mark Ruffalo), increasingly passionate as the investigation gathers steam; Sacha Pfeiffer (Rachel McAdams), keeping a compassionate eye on the victims; and Matt Carroll (Brian d'Arcy James), who delves into the detail. As their misgivings fall away, they try to enlist the victims' lawyer, Mitchell Garabedian (Stanley Tucci), and meticulously gather evidence that something really was hidden.

It's a story of unglamorous leg-work rather than thundering revelation. The drama here comes from the detail, and the reporters' slow realisation that their investigation could change the world far beyond Boston's city limits. The Church's power is revealed as smoke, mirrors and an unwarranted sense of deference, with journalism at its best proving its worth.

Director Thomas McCarthy's great strength is in his refusal to pander to audiences, or to default to easy answers; the correct reaction to the team's work is horror rather than jubilation. And while admirable, the reporters take some blame upon themselves. This crisis, after all, developed under their noses and it took an outsider to force them to examine it. Similarly, the cast modestly play down their characters' achievements and reputations. There is no Oscar-bait grandstanding (well, maybe one moment) and they all look quietly dowdy without indulging in any unnecessary uglification. These journalist greats could happily have rubbed shoulders with Woodward and Bernstein in *All The President's Men*, and they bring down an even bigger institution.

Talky and intelligent, this lacks the glib edge of Aaron Sorkin or the poppy zip of Tarantino. Given the subject matter, too much lightness would be inappropriate. Instead, its tone is led by its characters, moving from scepticism to revelation and the uncomfortable sense that we should all feel guilty for ignoring the secrets too hard to acknowledge. **HELEN O'HARA**

VERDICT A grown-up film about serious people that mercifully escapes any awards-grabbing platitudes, this is more thrilling than most action movies.



The 33

★★

OUT **JANUARY 29** / CERT. **12A** / **127 MINS.**
DIRECTOR Patricia Riggen
CAST Antonio Banderas, Lou Diamond Phillips, Juliette Binoche

→ *The* uplifting news story of 2010, the ordeal of 33 Chilean miners trapped in a collapsed mine for 69 days deserves a better movie than this. Beneath ground, it draws a crew of thinly sketched types — an angry alcoholic, a young father-to-be, an old timer due to retire, an ostracised Bolivian — led by a too-good-to-be-true Banderas. Above ground, it is possibly worse, drilling into disaster movie-style rescue attempts (represented by the none-more-Chilean Gabriel Byrne) and sudsy family dramas (represented by the none-more-Chilean Binoche). The bones of the story work, but you want a script and director to nail the telling details, political depths and emotional truth. Instead we get broad strokes, TV-movie shallows and a heavy-handed James Horner score that practically hits you over the head with a panpipe. **IF**



Bone Tomahawk

★★★★

OUT **FEBRUARY 19** / CERT. **18** / **132 MINS.**
DIRECTOR S. Craig Zahler
CAST Kurt Russell, Patrick Wilson, Matthew Fox, Richard Jenkins, David Arquette, Lili Simmons

→ Debut director Zahler gives us a pleasantly old-fashioned 'lost posse' plot with engaging, odd characters striving against the wilderness. Sheriff Hunt (Russell) leads a squabbling group — hot-tempered and crippled Wilson, garrulous deputy Jenkins and fancy-dressed mercenary Fox — in pursuit of cannibal tribesmen who have abducted an injured prisoner and a doctor from his jail. Its influences veer all over the map, from the Coen brothers to Rob Zombie, while there's a touch of the way Quentin Tarantino has picked up on the chattiness of Howard Hawks' Westerns in the lengthy conversation scenes even as our heroes face impossible terrain or mad killers. A mash-up of *The Searchers* and *Cannibal Ferox*, this is a strong prairie stew. **KN**

DID YOU KNOW?

Juliette Binoche is godmother to five Cambodian orphans, through her work with French charity *Enfants d'Asie*.





Concussion

★★

OUT **FEBRUARY 12** / CERT. **12A** / **123 MINS.**
DIRECTOR Peter Landesman
CAST Will Smith, Gugu Mbatha-Raw, Albert Brooks

→ The story of Dr. Bennet Omalu — the Nigerian coroner living in Pittsburgh who identified a pattern of brain damage among veteran American football players and was persecuted for it rather than praised — is fascinating. It involves conspiracy, whistle-blowing, hard science and a doozy of a question: what do you do when the national pastime proves dangerous to health? The movie *Concussion*, which tells this story, is a middle-of-the-road drama populated by stock characters. At its heart is a single impressive performance from Smith as Omalu, notable because, with his thick, mellifluous accent and gentle, precise mannerisms, this is the least Will Smith turn we've seen yet. But writer/director Landesman has turned out a film that nonetheless remains desperately conventional and never communicates that sense of inspiration. **DJ**



Freeheld

★★★

OUT **FEBRUARY 19** / CERT. **12A** / **101 MINS.**
DIRECTOR Peter Sollett
CAST Julianne Moore, Ellen Page, Michael Shannon, Steve Carell, Josh Charles

→ Thank goodness for Steve Carell. He brings a zap of much-needed energy to a movie that is otherwise oppressively earnest. Based on a true story, Moore plays Laurel Hester, a closeted New Jersey detective. Even when she falls in love with Stacie (Page), she can't bring herself to come out for fear of stalling the career for which she's worked so hard. However, when Laurel is diagnosed with cancer, her life becomes public property as she fights for Stacie to receive her pension benefits after her death. Carell is the loud-and-proud LGBT activist who gets wind of their cause and sweeps in to make it national news and steal the best lines. The acting is impressive all round, but Sollett's direction of a dreary script demands emotional reactions it hasn't earned. **OR**

DID YOU KNOW?

Before playing a gay rights campaigner here, Steve Carell voiced one of *The Ambiguously Gay Duo* in *Saturday Night Live's* cartoon series





The Finest Hours

★★

OUT **FEBRUARY 19** / CERT. **TBC** / **117 MINS.**

DIRECTOR Craig Gillespie
CAST Chris Pine, Casey Affleck, Ben Foster, Holliday Grainger, Eric Bana

PLOT 1952. Coast Guard officer Bernie Webber (Pine) is sent on a mission to save the crew of the SS Pendleton, an oil tanker split in half off the New England coast.

THE FINEST HOURS is set at the start of the '50s and, save the digital effects, it feels like a film from the '50s, too. Based on the real-life rescue of 32 men from an oil tanker ripped in half, it's an old-fashioned paean to heroism that delivers decent action but gives good actors little to work with in the way of nuance or sophistication.

Consider the dramatis personae. Chris Pine's Coast Guard officer Bernie Webber is the least-favoured son (he never saw World War II action), burdened by an ill-fated rescue attempt nine years ago, who has grown into a stickler for the rules. To raise the stakes, he has recently become engaged to sparky Miriam (Holliday Grainger, in a succession of great coats presumably borrowed from the set of *Carol*). Dispatched by Captain Hard Bastard (Eric Bana), Webber's rag-tag rescue party consists of a naysayer (Ben Foster), a mechanic (Kyle Gainer) and a rookie seaman (John Magaro) who has only ever chipped paint.

Over on the sinking SS Pendleton, we get Casey Affleck's Ray Sybert, an antisocial engineer with a preternatural understanding of the ship's workings and no truck with the notion of luck. He is surrounded by a motley crew of stock disaster-flick characters: the no-nonsense one, the scared one, the singing one (he warbles *Sit Down, You're Rockin' The Boat* — it's that kind of movie) and the let's-take-our-chances-in-the-lifeboats one. It's not spoiling anything to say that the buttoned-up Pine will throw caution to the wind, Affleck will experience the magic of good fortune and Grainger will forget her outerwear.

As with *The Walk* and *Everest*, you get the sense that part of the impetus to make this now is from the desire to use 3D, to put the audience in the heart of a raging sea — and the splitting of the Pendleton is spectacular. But director Craig Gillespie doesn't need it to create impact — the film's most gripping action sequence sees Webber negotiating "the bar", an almighty surge of the sea that we are repeatedly told no-one can master. Gillespie also finds visual invention elsewhere: the camera following a series of orders from the top deck to the bowels of the ship in one swooping shot, and the townsfolk turning on their car headlights to help the sailors home.

> Remarkably, Chris and Holliday had never seen a tealight in a fancy glass before.

Thematically, this has all the stuff of a great movie — courage in the face of ridiculous odds, ingenuity in a crisis, underdogs being rewarded — but it doesn't quite land. This is partly because it never finds elegant ways to set up Sybert's ingenuity and partly because it grinds through the disaster-movie gears so slavishly. And then the crunch of the rescue, after all the drama, boils down to negotiating a ladder. That might be the truth, but it ain't great cinema. **IAN FREER**

VERDICT A strong cast and impressive action sequences can't find subtleties or surprises to enliven a rote period disaster movie. It hits the right points, but mechanically.



Trumbo

★★★

OUT **FEBRUARY 5** / CERT. **15** / **124 MINS.**

DIRECTOR Jay Roach
CAST Bryan Cranston, Diane Lane, Elle Fanning, Alan Tudyk, Michael Stuhlbarg, John Goodman, Helen Mirren

PLOT Hollywood screenwriter Dalton Trumbo (Cranston) is celebrated for his work, but barely tolerated for his vocal communism. Then, when the Red Scare goes into full effect, he and his fellow leftist writers are punished and exiled for their views.

GIVEN HE'S THE director behind the *Austin Powers* and *Meet The Parents* movies, Jay Roach isn't the kind of guy you'd expect to find hefting such weighty historical material as the investigations by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) into the supposed communist 'threat' from Hollywood during the late '40s and '50s. Yet while he lacks the flair to elevate *Trumbo* visually or structurally — it is broad and flat and straightforwardly chronological — he allows a lightness of touch that, for all the ruined lives on display, feels appropriate to a narrative set entirely within the entertainment industry.

Roach might not have got away with it if he hadn't landed himself the best possible leading man in the form of Bryan Cranston. Having impressed from the sidelines in that other Hollywood-based historical drama *Argo*, here he moves to the centre and owns the show completely, even if it is already stuffed with eye-catching performances.

Michael Stuhlbarg may preen perfectly as compromised star Edward G. Robinson, John Goodman may dextrously balance aggression and bonhomie as larger-than-life B-pic baron Frank King, and Helen Mirren may snap you upright in your seat as impassioned commie-hater Hedda Hopper (she doesn't so much chew the scenery as wither it with her glare), but Cranston *is* Dalton Trumbo. With his face pulled into an almost permanently wry smile, his posture hunched as if forever sat at an invisible typewriter, his voice remodulated into a dry, crisp burr, ideal for dropping well-aimed *bon mots* and put-downs into any conversation or confrontation, Cranston possesses the part like, well, a man possessed.

That includes Trumbo's flaws. As he gulps down bennies and turns his household into an illicit, script-producing sweatshop, this "swimming-pool Soviet" has become a domestic dictator. Hypocrisy is a luxury he can afford, while his ideals are more than matched by his ego.

> It was Curry Club night down the Wetherspoon.

How accurate this portrayal is to the real blacklisted writer is irrelevant. This is about embodying and exemplifying the spirit of a man whose life was pulled apart just as he'd reached the peak of his career, and who then fought back with a tenacity that's nothing short of admirable, whatever you think of his politics. So when you witness Cranston-as-Dalton dressing down a strident and intimidating John Wayne (David James Elliott), it is a true, punch-the-air moment. He makes it hard to imagine anyone else duking it out with The Duke and strolling away with their face intact. **DAN JOLIN**

VERDICT It feels terrestrial rather than cinematic, but the joy of *Trumbo* is in the heroism of its subject and an amazing performance from Cranston.

ALSO OUT

King Jack

★★★★

OUT **FEBRUARY 26** / CERT. **TBC** / **81 MINS.**
DIRECTOR Felix Thompson
CAST Charlie Plummer, Cory Nichols, Christian Madsen, Danny Flaherty

→ Proving that a familiar story can still surprise if well told, Felix Thompson's debut brings an assured sense of place and perspective to the rite-of-passage format, as a 15 year-old loner (Plummer) learns how to cope with brothers, bullies and girls over one fraught weekend. **DP**

Rams

★★★★

OUT **FEBRUARY 5** / CERT. **15** / **93 MINS.**
DIRECTOR Grímur Hákonarson
CAST Sigurður Sigurjónsson, Theodór Júlíusson, Charlotte Bøving

→ Having barely spoken for 40 years, two brothers (Sigurjónsson, Júlíusson) must cooperate when a disease decimates their flock of sheep in a desolate Icelandic valley. Switching from deadpan humour to poignant drama, this is a masterclass in combining character and landscape. **DP**

Noble

★★

OUT **FEBRUARY 12** / CERT. **15** / **99 MINS.**
DIRECTOR Stephen Bradley
CAST Deirdre O'Kane, Liam Cunningham, Sarah Greene

→ Stephen Bradley's gentle heartwarmer flits between the efforts of Irishwoman Christina Noble (O'Kane) to help the kids of Ho Chi Minh and her own experiences growing up in a Dublin slum. While at times it defaults to kitchen-sink clichés, much like its hero, its heart is in the right place. **JN**



Mavis!

★★★

OUT **FEBRUARY 19** / CERT. **TBC** / **85 MINS.**
DIRECTOR Jessica Edwards
CAST Mavis Staples, Bob Dylan, Jeff Tweedy, Bonnie Raitt

→ This documentary profile of Mavis Staples explores the mix of gospel, blues and R&B pioneered by The Staple Singers, one of American music's best-kept secrets, and the role the band played in the civil rights movement. First-time director Jessica Edwards lines up an impressive array of talking heads but allows Mavis to avoid much discussion of her private life, beyond extolling her father's virtues. Moreover, Edwards struggles to capture the dynamism of the seventy-something's live performances. Brimful of glorious sounds and compelling archive footage, this affectionate if not particularly insightful fan letter says as much about Pops Staples' artistic and political evolution as it does about his devoted daughter, who deserves to be ranked among the all-time greats. **PP**

DID YOU KNOW?
Mavis Staples actually turned down a marriage proposal from Bob Dylan, after he asked her father for her hand.





Dirty Grandpa

★★

OUT **JANUARY 29** / CERT. **15** / **102 MINS.**
DIRECTOR Dan Mazer
CAST Robert De Niro, Zac Efron, Julianne Hough, Aubrey Plaza

→ Zac Efron adds another arrested-development comedy to his roster, this time as the uptight grandson of Robert De Niro's recently widowed Dick. Grandpa emotionally blackmails him into taking a road trip, which becomes a lesson in loosening up, getting drunk, getting naked, getting high, grabbing life by the balls, and making lots of jokes about balls. De Niro and Efron go all-in but there's something dated about the script, graspingly keen to be edgy but often wearyingly outmoded — are we honestly still treating gay euphemisms as a bottomless well of hilarity? Even if the film takes a moment to sheepishly acknowledge its more offensive gags, it's still asking for laughs from them. Dick casually having a wank in front of his grandson about sums up the tone we're working with here. **OR**



Triple 9

★★★

OUT **FEBRUARY 19** / CERT. **TBC** / **TBC MINS.**
DIRECTOR John Hillcoat
CAST Casey Affleck, Chiwetel Ejiofor, Anthony Mackie, Kate Winslet, Aaron Paul

→ With echoes of Ben Affleck's *The Town*, *Triple 9* is a tough, multi-populated thriller that has a lot to like but doesn't deliver on its promise. Blackmailed by Kate Winslet's hard-as-nails Russian-Israeli mobster matriarch, a gang of crooked cops (Chiwetel Ejiofor, Anthony Mackie, Aaron Paul) take on a heist that is only possible if they kill a rookie officer (Casey Affleck) to misdirect the police. It has a terrific opening robbery, some bone-crunching violence (as you'd expect from the director of *The Proposition*), a strong cast and an interestingly drawn world. But it never transcends its familiar story elements — one last heist, Affleck's cop who just wants to make difference — and the story runs out of steam in the middle. Imagine *Heat*, but slightly off the boil. **IF**

DID YOU KNOW?
Triple 9 star Chiwetel Ejiofor sang in a band called Blind during the early '90s. They were not a chart success.





Meru

★★★★

OUT **FEBRUARY TBC** / CERT. **15** / **90 MINS.**
DIRECTORS Jimmy Chin, Elizabeth Chai Vasarhelyi
CAST Conrad Anker, Jimmy Chin, Renan Ozturk

→ Punching at the stars of the Himalayan sky, Meru Peak is the mountaineer's ultimate nemesis: a near-impossible ascent of ice, rock and wall climb, topped off by a 4,000-foot granite face known as the Shark's Fin. This film chronicles two expeditions to conquer the summit, both led by Conrad Anker. Rock-umentaries usually rely on reconstruction, but not here. Rope in one hand, camera in the other, Jimmy Chin invites you to 'live' the ascent, combining vertiginous, palm-drenching spectacle with psychological drama that plunges deep into the climbers' defiant, do-or-die mindset. As they reach for the heavens, they go through hell. This gripping tale of hubris, obsession and thundering avalanches is quite an experience. Catch it on the big screen and don't look down. **SC**



13 Hours: The Secret Soldiers of Benghazi

★★★

OUT **JANUARY 29** / CERT. **TBC** / **144 MINS.**

DIRECTOR Michael Bay
CAST John Krasinski, James Badge Dale, Pablo Schreiber, David Denman, Max Martini

PLOT A ferocious re-enactment of the attacks by militants on the US diplomatic outpost in Benghazi in Libya, from the perspective of the six-man team trying to guard it.

PULLING IN MORE than $5 billion at the box office is no mean feat. Michael Bay's work is the epitome of the American blockbuster, pleasing crowds the world over, but many critics remain stubbornly unmoved. Maybe that's why Bay has shelved high-octane *sturm und drang* for now and applied his talents to more thoughtful material. Hence *13 Hours: The Secret Soldiers Of Benghazi,* a dramatic reconstruction of the 2012 attacks by militants on the American diplomatic compound in Benghazi, as seen by the security team tasked with its defence.

The movie's focus is ex-SEAL-turned-security officer Jack Silva, played by *The Office*'s John Krasinski. He's transformed himself from average-schlub to ripped action hero. Once you get past the suspicion that he's going to glance wearily into the camera at any moment, he's highly believable as the semi-reluctant combatant in a battle that looks impossible to win.

On arrival in Benghazi, Silva is picked up by Tyrone Woods (James Badge Dale), who tells him, "You can't tell the good guys from the bad." That sets the tone for what follows. When the attacks come, it's literally a bloody mess. Vastly outnumbered, Silva,Woods and their team fight to keep dozens of militants at bay until back-up arrives.

The resultant battle is long and brutal, an inexorable collage of lost limbs and splaying blood, all presented in Bay's signature fast edit, slo-mo style. It's extremely tough to watch.

No doubt Bay is hoping *13 Hours...* will follow in the footsteps of 2014's *American Sniper*. Unlike Clint Eastwood's surprise hit, however, there's little stillness to counteract the chaos and we never really get to know these men. Aside from perfunctory backstory and a token collage of Skype sessions with loved ones back home, Silva and his armour-plated buddies may as well be, well, robots. **TONY HORKINS**

VERDICT Bay squanders the potential to explore the nuances of a politically sensitive issue and instead descends into a gruesome display of war porn.

Pablo Schrieber, John Krasinski and David Denman not quite getting "secret".



One And Two

★★

OUT **JANUARY 29** / CERT. **TBC** / **90 MINS.**
DIRECTOR Andrew Droz Palermo
CAST Timothée Chalamet, Kiernan Shipka, Grant Bowler, Elizabeth Reaser

→ *Mad Men*'s Kiernan Shipka graduates to her first lead in this sort-of-thriller as Eva — the "one" of the title — raised with her brother (Chalamet) in a walled community in the American South, where only they and their parents (Bowler and Reaser) still live. Alternately sheltered and threatened by their fanatical, God-fearing father for their unnatural ability to — wait for it — teleport, the siblings find themselves in crisis when their lives are disrupted and the world outside beckons. It looks beautiful and there is an interesting denouement, but it disappoints; the build-up just isn't developed enough for it to matter. **KP**



The Survivalist

★★★★

OUT **FEBRUARY 12** / CERT. **TBC** / **104 MINS.**
DIRECTOR Stephen Fingleton
CAST Martin McCann, Olwen Fouéré, Mia Goth

→ After the fall of civilisation, a hermit (McCann) lives in a shack in the woods and works a tiny vegetable patch. Two women — Kathryn (Fouéré) and her daughter Milja (Goth) — approach and beg to share his farm. An uneasy new family is formed, but there are dangerous ravagers nearby. In this grim, intensely physical post-apocalyptic vision, writer-director Stephen Fingleton pares down dialogue to show how much has been lost with the end of civilisation. It's an unsentimental science-fiction film, though the performances suggest small surviving flames of empathy and yearning amid the tough attitudes. **KN**



Goosebumps

★★★★

OUT **FEBRUARY 5** / CERT. **PG** / **103 MINS.**

DIRECTOR Rob Letterman
CAST Jack Black, Dylan Minnette, Odeya Rush, Amy Ryan

PLOT When the monstrous creations of *Goosebumps* author R. L. Stine (Jack Black) escape the confines of the magic books that act as their prisons, only Stine and a motley crew of teenagers can stop the rampage.

IT'S SCARY HOW easily supernatural comedy can go wrong. For every *Ghostbusters* there seems to be a dozen films like *R.I.P.D.* — neither funny nor terrifying enough to make an impact. Happily, *Goosebumps* gets it just right. It's consistently arch and knowing from the off, and while the scares won't wake you up at three in the morning drenched in sweat, there are enough smartly manufactured jumps to keep things interesting.

It helps to have solid source material, in this case R. L. Stine's collection of spooky tales for teens and tweens. Rather than adapting a single book, director Rob Letterman and screenwriter Darren Lemke (working from an idea by Scott Alexander and Larry Karaszewski) bet everything on Jack Black, placing his incarnation of Stine at the heart of an adventure in which the myriad monsters from all those luridly titled books come to life and wreak havoc on a small town.

The supernatural smorgasbord offers up killer gnomes (from *Revenge Of The Lawn Gnomes*), hungry yeti (*The Abominable Snowman Of Pasadena*) and the principal villain of the piece, a malevolent ventriloquist's dummy called Slappy (from *Night Of The Living Dummy* and voiced by Black). The one-damn-undead-thing-after-another onslaught works a treat, constantly posing the film's heroes new challenges and, crucially, supplying a fresh stream of gags.

Letterman and Black last worked together on 2010's *Gulliver's Travels*, but fear not: this time their partnership really works. Dialling back his usual mania, Black is a coiled spring of sarcasm as the tenacious R. L. battling his own worst mistakes. The decision to deploy Stine as a character is a masterstroke,

> They were all desperate for Jack's skincare tips.

leading to a succession of gloriously meta moments — most notably a rant about the success of a rival author, one "Steve" King.

But for all this, Black isn't really the lead — that honour instead goes to the winning Dylan Minnette as Zach Cooper. Minnette demonstrates the charm of a young Tom Hanks, playing a kid who's just moved to the area with his mother (an excellent Amy Ryan) and who is recovering from the death of his father. And this is the film's most surprising element: it tackles death, loss and the nature of grieving with a deft hand, while never forgetting the pleasures to be had from a creepy puppet with a Napoleon complex. **CHRIS HEWITT**

VERDICT This modern riff on *Monster Squad* is a very pleasant surprise, and so '80s in spirit that it's a shock one of the villains isn't a giant Rubik's Cube.

ALSO OUT

Janis: Little Girl Blue

★★★

OUT **FEBRUARY 5** / CERT. **TBC** / **103 MINS.**
DIRECTOR Amy J. Berg
CAST Peter Albin, Sam Andrew, Dick Cavett, D. A. Pennebaker

→ This documentary sidelines Janis Joplin's fabled vocal style to focus on her conservative upbringing and juvenile traumas. These may have fuelled the drug use that led to her death at 27, after four years of groundbreaking creativity — but what about the performances? **DP**

Oddball And The Penguins

★★

OUT **FEBRUARY 12** / CERT. **U** / **95 MINS.**
DIRECTOR Stuart McDonald
CAST Sarah Snook, Shane Jacobson

→ In 2005, a dog became an Australian hero, protecting a colony of penguins from foxes. Sadly this film, based on that sweet true story, is just corny, with overwrought performances, a relentlessly jaunty score and effects that make it clear the furry star never went near the flippery ones. **NDS**

The Propaganda Game

★★★

OUT **FEBRUARY 26** / CERT. **TBC** / **90 MINS.**
DIRECTOR Álvaro Longoria
CAST Alejandro Cao, Álvaro Longoria

→ A filmmaker granted access to North Korea brings back fascinating footage of that secretive regime, but frustratingly little analysis. There's some suggestion here that we too are the victims of state propaganda, but Longoria can't provide definitive answers on anything, so that suggestion doesn't quite stick. **HOH**



Youth

★★★

OUT **JANUARY 29** / CERT. **15** / **124 MINS.**
DIRECTOR Paolo Sorrentino
CAST Michael Caine, Harvey Keitel, Rachel Weisz, Paul Dano, Jane Fonda

→ If 2013's *The Great Beauty* saw Paolo Sorrentino giving Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* a modern spin, his latest film riffs on the same ideas as the great auteur's *8½* — artistic impasse, ennui, really languid dream sequences — while adding some grey to its temples. In this rumination on old age set in a grand Alpine spa, Michael Caine's maestro resists the chance to play his magnum opus in front of the Queen, while Harvey Keitel's film director toils to make his. Both revel in chunky roles, but the director's visual flights of fancy add a distancing glaze and emotional connection proves elusive. **PDS**



A Bigger Splash

★★★

OUT **FEBRUARY 12** / CERT. **TBC** / **125 MINS.**
DIRECTOR Luca Guadagnino
CAST Tilda Swinton, Ralph Fiennes, Dakota Johnson, Matthias Schoenaerts

→ Inspired by '60s French erotic thriller *La Piscine*, *A Bigger Splash* isn't so much a remake as a gaudy cover version. Tilda Swinton plays rock star Marianne Lane, who's recovering from throat surgery in Sicily with her lover (Schoenaerts). Their idyll is disrupted when Marianne's ex, Harry (Fiennes), turns up with a taciturn daughter (Johnson) in tow. A sexually charged four-hander ensues, with Fiennes excellent as the mercurial, frequently nude Harry. The tone lurches wildly, however, and when Fiennes isn't on screen the energy goes with him, leading to a climax that ought to be powerful and ironic but simply falls flat. **DW**



Pride + Prejudice + Zombies

★★

OUT **FEBRUARY 11** / CERT. **TBC** / **TBC MINS.**

DIRECTOR Burr Steers
CAST Lily James, Sam Riley, Jack Huston, Douglas Booth, Charles Dance

PLOT In the early 19th century, much of England has been overrun by ghouls. Meanwhile, the Bennet sisters juggle zombie-slaying with romance.

A FEW YEARS AGO we got *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*, a movie that promised to revitalise a fusty subject by unleashing monsters on it. It turned out to be a joyless dud. Now along comes *Pride + Prejudice + Zombies*, a similar project, based on another mash-up book by Seth Grahame-Smith. Sad to say, while it's better than its predecessor, the formula remains unmastered.

At least this time there's a cracking cast. Leaning into those "new Keira Knightley" comparisons by taking on a role Knightley played in 2005, Lily James proves adept at all the variations of shade Elizabeth Bennet requires, by turns coquettish, plucky and peeved. While Sam Riley's Mr. Darcy is a little bland, heavyweight names like Charles Dance and Lena Headey provide support. And Matt Smith steals the show as the silly Mr. Collins, milking lines like, "Oh fuddle," for all they're worth.

But all of the above just makes you lament that this adaptation has those two extra words in the title, because every time a zombie lurches on screen the film stops dead. The problems begin with the set-up: this is a world where the threat is nothing new, where country estates have been fortified and ladies carry blades beneath their corsets. That means that none of the characters worry too much about the decomposing bastards — and for long stretches, the film appears to forget about them too. Then, all of a sudden, a scene will come along that drops reams of exposition about a "zombie Antichrist" or the "Four Horsemen". Rather than instill a sense of dread and urgency, the muddled mythology further bogs us down and feels shoehorned in.

There are some decent action beats in the effects-packed last reel, as our heroes head to London for a desperate stand-off against the zombie hordes. But they can't dispel the feeling that this is a misshapen venture, a horror-comedy without much in the way of laughs or scares. And zombie purists beware: these biters don't just run. They talk too. **NICK DE SEMLYEN**

VERDICT The premise promised Regency class and Romero shocks. The results, though, are only intermittently entertaining, and a better adaptation of Austen than a monster mash.

It was a truly enormous loaf of bread.

The 5th Wave

★★

OUT **NOW** / CERT. **15** / **112 MINS.**

DIRECTOR J Blakeson
CAST Chloë Grace Moretz, Alex Roe, Nick Robinson, Liev Schreiber, Ron Livingston, Zackary Arthur, Maria Bello

PLOT Aliens have come to Earth and are gradually wiping out humanity. Teenager Cassie (Moretz) decides to fight back when someone precious is taken from her.



Chloë Grace Moretz starts out strong and ends up sappy as world-saving teenager Cassie.

TEENAGE-GIRL-saves-post-apocalyptic-world movies, you can't move for 'em these days. This one is based on a series by Rick Yancey that boasts a much more coherent idea than, say, *Divergent*. If only it were more original in execution.

It starts excitingly enough, with our heroine, Cassie (Chloë Grace Moretz), killing a stranger in a panic. That instantly gives us a world of high stakes in which all moral bets are off. Then we learn that Earth is under steady attack from an alien species, hovering in spaceships and releasing waves of destruction — disease, tsunamis, electromagnetic pulses — to clean away humanity, like pest controllers fumigating a house before you move in. There's a brutal practicality to the way director J Blakeson relates this apocalypse, with little time to mourn as Cassie learns survival on the fly.

It must be these scenes that earned the film a 15 instead of the usual 12A; there's a dark familiarity that we haven't seen in the more distant dystopias of other adaptations. This twisted tone does not last, sadly.

As soon as Cassie meets a boy, Evan (Alex Roe), who is a bit different from the other boy she likes, Ben (Nick Robinson), the mood swings away from Cassie as a woman of action to Cassie as a woman able to sigh in a variety of locations. Cassie sighs at Evan as he chops wood. Cassie sighs at Evan as he rinses his pecs in a lake. If there's a sequel, perhaps we'll get to see Cassie sigh as Evan cradles an injured puppy or builds an orphanage. Of course, romance is an important part of many young-adult films, but couldn't it be done with more dynamism? A bit more than the basic 'he's complicated; she's confused' schtick? Admittedly, she's weak from blood-loss for part of their acquaintance, but the lightheadedness lasts far too long.

The adults also get short shrift. Blakeson had the foresight to cast the likes of Maria Bello and Liev Schreiber to add some weight, but they simply don't have enough space to make an impact.

By the time we reach the second hour, it's all box-ticking. Kids outsmart the grown-ups? Done. One of the romantic interests turns out to be more complicated than he seems? Yup. A whole lot of questions about what's going on, virtually none of which are answered because you want people to come back for a sequel? Wearyingly, yes. This began with the promise of a braver tone than most of its predecessors; it ends content to blend into the crowd. **OLLY RICHARDS**

VERDICT Everything that comes after the confident, dangerous first half-hour just makes you pine for what could have been as this devolves into ten-a-penny teen-lit sludge.

ALSO OUT

Alvin And The Chipmunks: The Road Chip

★★

OUT **FEBRUARY 12** / CERT. **U** / **92 MINS.**
DIRECTOR Walt Becker
CAST (VOICES) Jason Lee, Kimberly Williams-Paisley, Justin Long

→ No pun is spurned in the fourth — sorry, fur-th — instalment of this stubborn franchise. Theodore, Simon and Alvin have a mission to Miami. Along the way squirrels are drugged, John Waters pops up and a macaw poos on Tony Hale. **PDS**

Breakdown

★

OUT **NOW** / CERT. **15** / **106 MINS.**
DIRECTOR Jonnie Malachi
CAST Craig Fairbrass, James Cosmo, Emmett J. Scanlan, Olivia Grant

→ Guilt-ridden hitman Alfie (Fairbrass) reaches breaking point during a contract kill, putting his family in danger. The everyman gangster mould fits Fairbrass, but he's undermined by an overstuffed script and weak supporting cast. By the finale, you're past caring. **ET**

Welcome To Leith

★★★★

OUT **FEBRUARY 12** / CERT. **TBC** / **87 MINS.**
DIRECTORS Michael Beach Nichols, Christopher K. Walker

→ In America's frosty Upper Midwest, a near-ghost town (population: 24) is rocked when a prominent neo-Nazi attempts to build a separatist enclave. A documentary that plays like a thriller, this is disturbing, compelling viewing, while the bleak, *Fargo*-esque landscape only adds to the atmosphere. **JN**



Point Break

★★

OUT **FEBRUARY 5** / CERT. **12A** / **114 MINS.**

DIRECTOR Ericson Core
CAST Édgar Ramirez, Luke Bracey, Ray Winstone, Teresa Palmer

PLOT When a group of Robin Hood-inspired thieves start pulling off daring, epic heists around the world, the FBI turns to young agent and extreme sports fan Johnny Utah (Bracey) to infiltrate the gang...

WHATEVER THE faults of director Kathryn Bigelow's 1991 thriller, which saw Keanu Reeves' FBI rookie Johnny Utah going undercover to catch Patrick Swayze's surfer criminal Bodhi, a lack of fun is not among them. Here, despite co-opting the basic concept of a daring criminal gang and the undercover agent seduced by their philosophy, this ambitious reboot fails to generate any of the same excitement.

That's surprising, given the effort here to make pulses race with the action elements. The crimes and their associated stunts are ramped up to better fit a world accustomed to the physics-defying antics of the *Fast & Furious* franchise — so the gang release pallets of money from a cargo plane and skydive after it, or take a death-defying wingsuit flight through a canyon. Director Ericson Core and the adventure-sports experts he drafted in aim for a high level of realism in their snowboarding, surfing and rock-climbing sequences (very much unlike the *Fast* movies), but the result never translates into a truly exciting high-stakes thriller. The admittedly impressive stunt work often makes this look like a documentary about daredevils rather than a narrative feature; in the wingsuits sequence, for example, the helmets remove any visual connection to the cast.

But the film is truly undone by the script, which plumps for the sort of merciless cliché avalanche you wouldn't survive even if you were an expert snowboarder. There is waffling about the spiritual nature of the crimes, a few moments ripped directly from Bigelow's original film, and another look at the loyalty-shifting battle of wits between the main characters. There's no emotional weight for Édgar Ramirez's would-be Bodhi or the brah-ish Luke Bracey, as Utah, to work with. You won't root for anyone, so the story feels like a poor photocopy of the original with a lot of unnecessary padding. **WILLIAM THOMAS**

VERDICT A joyless and pointless remake. The new take on Bodhi and co. squanders a potentially enjoyable premise and rarely delivers, except on the occasional stunt.

Édgar Ramirez, as Bodhi, fails to fill Patrick Swayze's flip-flops.

AT A GLANCE



OUT NOW
Breakdown ★ p.45
The 5th Wave ★★ p.45

JANUARY 29
Dirty Grandpa ★★ p.41
One And Two ★★ p.42
Spotlight ★★★★ p.36
13 Hours: The Secret Soldiers Of Benghazi ★★★ p.42
The 33 ★★ p.38
Youth ★★★ p.44

FEBRUARY 5
Goosebumps ★★★★ p.43
Janis: Little Girl Blue ★★★ p.43
Point Break ★★ p.46
Rams ★★★★ p.40
Trumbo ★★★ p.40

FEBRUARY 11
Pride + Prejudice + Zombies ★★ p.44

FEBRUARY 12
Alvin And The Chipmunks: The Road Chip ★★ p.45
A Bigger Splash ★★★ p.44
Concussion ★★ p.38
Noble ★★ p.40
Oddball & The Penguins ★★ p.43
The Survivalist ★★★★ p.42
Welcome To Leith ★★★★ p.45

FEBRUARY 19
Bone Tomahawk ★★★★ p.38
The Finest Hours ★★ p.39
Freeheld ★★★ p.38
Mavis! ★★★ p.41
Triple 9 ★★★ p.41

FEBRUARY 26
King Jack ★★★★ p.40
The Propaganda Game ★★★ p.43

FEBRUARY TBC
Meru ★★★★ p.41

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Empire heads to the heart of the zombie apocalypse in Georgia to investigate the TV phenomenon that is *The Walking Dead* and how it is that after 75 episodes its flesh-craving undead are...

Still Walking

WORDS **JOHN NAUGHTON**





The *Walking Dead*

gift shop in Senoia, Georgia, is thronged. The Blue Knights motorcycle club, all leather waistcoats, muscular shoulders and five o'clock shadows, has recently rolled into the small town and made a beeline for the store, situated a short zombie stagger up the hill from the Alexandria set where Season 6 is currently shooting. All things Daryl Dixon, *The Walking Dead*'s embodiment of this particular demographic, are flying off the shelves, while groups of bandana-wearing gentlemen crowd around one of Daryl's motorbikes, taking selfies. On everything from model crossbows to mousemats, Norman Reedus' narrowed eyes glare out above the legend, "Everyone makes fun of the redneck. Until the zombie apocalypse."

It's a statement which also speaks of the show's hard-headed individualism, which has come to reflect back the spirit of the Deep South, where it's filmed. This is a show which was rejected by an established network, NBC, and picked up by then brash upstart AMC. This is a show that ditched its big-name creatives and burned through showrunners, a show that has survived and thrived on financial cutbacks, a show that has been variously seen as somewhere to the right of Charlton Heston and a haven for bedwetting liberals. It is, in short, for everybody.

At the unlikely nexus where soap opera intersects with *The Moral Maze* and *28 Days Later...*, this is a show which has snagged more adult cable viewers than any other in the States: the Season 5 premiere drew 17.3 million viewers alone. It is in equal parts a bloodthirsty, skull-popping, gun-toting terrorfest, a meditation on democracy and a foundation myth for the *Call Of Duty* generation. Though some in the Seven Kingdoms might remonstrate, this is the most-watched cable drama in the Western World.

Look for reasons to

explain this phenomenal success and you swiftly realise they are manifold, even contradictory. But Andrew Lincoln — aka erstwhile sheriff Rick Grimes, a battle-hardened survivor of innumerable violent clashes with both the living and the undead — believes *The Walking Dead*'s appeal is simple: empathy. "I hope it's that everyone has their own favourite character that they identify with and root for," says the 42 year-old Londoner, his American drawl still intact. He's sceptical, however, about whether there's something else going on, if *The Walking Dead* works because it represents the modern world. "Our job is just to tell a really cool story," he reasons. "The moment you get into metaphor you sound really pretentious and that's something I'm allergic to."

Reflecting the leadership dilemma playing out in Alexandria in Seasons 5 and 6, Tovah Feldshuh, aka former senator and the beleagured town's matriarch Deanna Monroe, begs to differ. "The walkers are not walkers," argues the veteran of TV, film and Broadway. "The walkers are ISIS, the walkers are Ebola, the walkers are AIDS and terminal cancer. It's like Bruno Bettelheim, the psychologist who wrote about our need for nightmares to process our fears, [says]: it has to come out of you and you have to see it. This series gives us an opportunity to process fear without direct bodily harm."

The Walking Dead's wider cultural influence is not difficult to spot. It was confirmed by a bizarre rant in April 2015 by right-wing commentator Glenn Beck, denouncing Americans who were prepared to watch executions on the show but not on ISIS videos. Even the more pragmatic Lincoln accepts that world affairs might have contributed to the show's success.

"You can't avoid fear at the moment," he acknowledges. "We're sold fear every day. That's how people make a lot of money, selling fear, that's what we do. That's what the media does. So it's in the air. We're telling a very scary story but it's about survival and, ultimately, it's about hope."

When Lincoln was first

cast as Rick back in 2010, he was best known as Egg in *This Life*, or the best man in *Love Actually* who secretly yearned for his mate's bride, Keira Knightley. You couldn't have imagined that he would fit the role of the steel-hard, colt-firing, machete-wielding Grimes so perfectly, yet the casting team of Sharon Bialy and Sherry Thomas saw what we couldn't have, and their brilliant and inventive matching of actors to roles has sustained the show ever since.

British performers like Lincoln, Lennie James (Morgan) and David Morrissey (The Governor) — not to ▷



Here: Daryl (Norman Reedus) inside the compound of Alexandria in Season 6. Below: Facing more peril in the premiere of Season 3.



“You never know what’s around the corner. It’s just like real life.” Norman Reedus



Super-cool katana-wielder Michonne (Danai Gurira): not too keen on zombies.



Sasha (Sonequa Martin-Green), with newly developed death wish after tragedy struck in Season 5.



Andrew Lincoln's Sheriff Rick Grimes, face to face with a wall of imprisoned walkers in Season 4.

mention Lauren Cohan (Maggie Greene), who moved to the UK aged 13 — have been used imaginatively and effectively (i.e. not only as villains). Most of all, having cast Michael Rooker as the racist redneck, Merle, the show saw the potential in Norman Reedus and created a role for him as Merle's brother, Daryl.

Despite being the breakout star of the show, Reedus plays down any notion that his sharp cheekbones (he was a former Prada model) and the straight-talking but sympathetic qualities of Daryl might have contributed hugely to its success. Pressed to give a reason why his character in particular has resonated so strongly with fans, provoking a craze for "If Daryl dies we riot" T-shirts among other outpourings of love, Reedus carefully deliberates and then, with a taciturnity of which his character would undoubtedly approve, declares, "He's not trying to bullshit you and he's definitely not judging you."

Reedus prefers to emphasise the show's sense of community — one that's only strengthened by the dire situation of its inhabitants. "It's an extraordinary world but it's filled with very ordinary people fighting to survive," he says. "It's a world without prejudice. It's a world without selfies and cell phones, hierarchies of money, a world where your word means something. You're judged not on where you come from or what you have or what you look like, but on what you will fight for. And in a world that's not like that, or very rarely like that, it's an escape from bullshit and you can live vicariously through these people who have each other's backs." It is strangely, perversely aspirational.

"We're sold fear every day. But this is about survival." Andrew Lincoln

Reedus also sees its appeal as rooted in the intensity of the jeopardy the members of that on-screen community face; they only become more beloved because we realise our time with them is precious. "You never know what's around the corner, it's just like real life," he says.

New arrivals on the show will note that there have already been over 250 cast members in six seasons. Bialy and Thomas might be able to offer great roles, but longevity is something they can't guarantee.

"Everybody knows if you've been hired from the third year onwards, you've come here to die," smiles Michael Cudlitz, who plays G. I. Abraham Ford, while Josh McDermitt, better known as the mullet-headed Eugene, reveals, "There are some members of the cast who when we go out for dinner, that's all they talk about. 'Oh my God, when am I gonna die, when am I gonna die?'"

It's not just the living

characters who are offed with such remarkable regularity and creativity. Underpinning both the show's appeal to hardcore fans of the comic and the more casual viewer are its zombies — sorry, 'walkers' — and the endlessly inventive ways they are introduced and dispatched.

The man most responsible for this is FX supremo Greg Nicotero (also director of over a dozen episodes to date), who learnt his craft from zombie godfather George A. Romero. A horror fan to his core — as a child he and his brother used to terrify themselves with trips to the morgue at the Pittsburgh hospital where his father worked as a doctor — Nicotero fizzes with excitement when describing innovative zombie destruction.

For a scene where a walker was hit by a car, he recalls hiring a contortionist to wrap their body around the wheel before adding "40 feet of intestines" around the axle. The show regularly employs amputees as zombies to create similarly striking effects.

Weapons Of Messy Destructon

THERE'S MORE THAN ONE WAY TO KILL A ZOMBIE... *EMPIRE* PRESENTS *THE WALKING DEAD'S* ULTIMATE UNDEAD-ENDERS

ILLUSTRATION **BILL McCONKEY**



"People look at me when I describe stuff like this and say, 'What is wrong with you?'" he laughs. "And I'm like, 'No, I just take what's on the page and I elevate it because I want to make sure that we're not doing the same thing over and over again.'"

While the execution of the zombie threat is clearly pivotal to the show's success, Nicotero is in no doubt who has done most, in recent years at least, to take the show to its current position of dominance.

"Scott Gimple, for sure. Scott has a unique vision. He's a comic-book guy at heart and he respects the source material but I really feel since he took over as showrunner in Season 4, the show has improved in quality tremendously."

Gimple had worked on shows like *Life*, *Drive* and *FlashForward*, and co-wrote the movie *Ghost Rider: Spirit Of Vengeance* before joining *The Walking Dead* crew in 2011 as a producer and writer. The show was a hit from the outset, but the quality of storylines, writing and the story arcs, particularly of female characters like Carol (Melissa McBride) and Michonne (Danai Gurira), have all improved since he took over at the start of the fourth season.

But the road to Gimple's accession was, like many a path on the show itself, not without its casualties. That it weathered so many storms before his arrival can be put down to the strength and endurance of its creator's vision.

In 2003, aged 24, comic

-book obsessive Robert Kirkman began writing *The Walking Dead*. Four years previously, he'd started his own publishing company, Funk-O-Tron, where he'd published *Battle Pope*, about a boozy, demon-hunting pontiff, but in 2002 indie publisher Image Comics hired him. His bosses there weren't impressed initially with another zombie strip, so he spun them a yarn about the undead being controlled by aliens and they went for it. A very smart white lie. Twelve years later there have been 150 issues with sales in the millions. Kirkman's creativity and productivity have underpinned the show's success to date. He's provided both a healthy fanbase and a bountiful supply of storylines and characters. Six series in and the TV show is still barely at the two-thirds point of the comic's existing universe. We are only just now coming to the arrival of the comic's übervillain, Negan, who in the form of Jeffrey Dean Morgan will dominate the remainder of Season 6. ("There's going to be a fight," promises Reedus. "I won't tell you who, when and where, but I can promise you a fight. All of us are about to clash with that motherfucker. There's a lot of turmoil in the second half of Season 6.")

When Kirkman's business partner David Alpert began offering the series to television, NBC held the option but ultimately passed, although as a network channel, it would never have stomached the necessary level of violence. More surprisingly, HBO also declined because the show's producers would not meet its request to tone down the violence. AMC, new to original programming and on a hot streak with *Mad Men* and *Breaking Bad*, gave the show the greenlight and it launched with a series of six episodes, the first premiering on Hallowe'en night, 2010.

With acclaimed director Frank Darabont in creative control, critics noted the movie-quality production values and the zombie apocalypse drama was an instant success. But there was soon blood on the carpet behind, as well as in front of, the camera. First, AMC demanded that the second season deliver 13 episodes for less money than the original six of Season 1, then to the surprise of cast and crew, Darabont left mid-season (this remains the subject of a multi-million-dollar lawsuit), replaced in the short term by Kirkman, then by Glen Mazzara. Unsurprisingly, Season 2 was a disappointment to most fans, the show's initial drive dissipating as the gang holed up at Hershel's farm. Crucially, however, ratings continued to climb. Despite this, showrunner Mazzara also foundered by the end of Season 3.

Where the truth lies about these departures is moot, but *The Walking Dead* bears out Harry Lime's famous line about conflict breeding creativity. The numbers rose and the show's transformation from genre favourite to the mainstream mega-hit was complete. Scott Gimple took over and a degree of harmony between the showrunner and creator was achieved. And the ratings continued to grow, to an unprecedented and previously unimaginable point where, as exec producer Gale Anne Hurd puts it, "We're bigger than *Sunday Night Football*."

Whatever other factors

have contributed to its success, *The Walking Dead* certainly has the gift of making the best of whatever hand it's dealt. Georgia was chosen as the filming location for tax-break reasons, yet its densely forested landscape,



Daryl and Carol (Melissa McBride) on guard in Season 6.



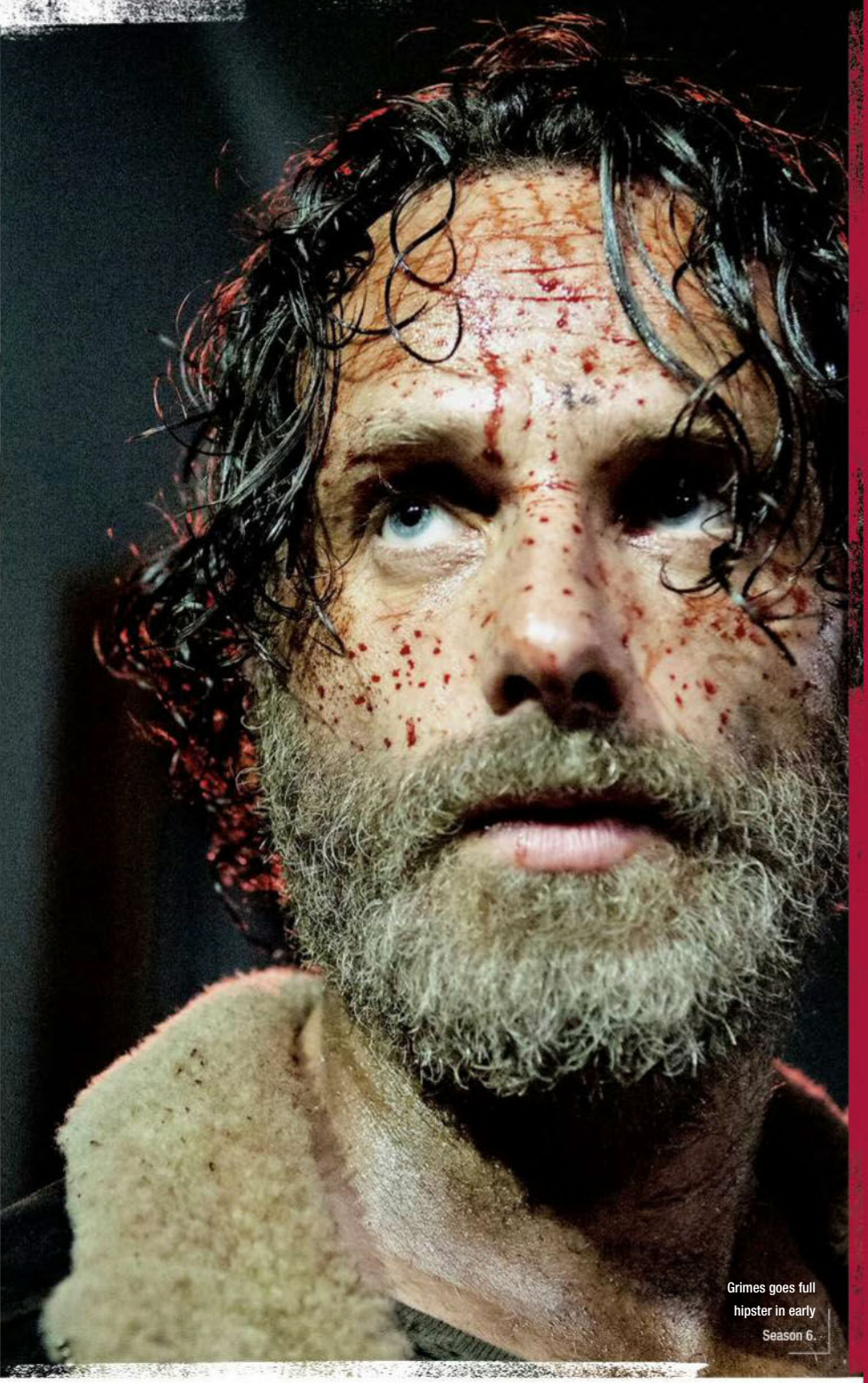
The small matter of being dead will not stop the walkers.



Rick and his son Carl (Chandler Riggs) take extreme measures — zombie guts — to dodge the walkers in Season 6.

"People look at me and say, 'What is wrong with you?!'"

Greg Nicotero, special effects make-up



Grimes goes full hipster in early Season 6.

both vast and claustrophobic, have fed in beautifully to the show's atmosphere of dread. Meanwhile, Andrew Lincoln has grown into both the role and his position as the cast's unofficial team leader.

"Andy's the driving force behind this show," confirms Reedus. "He's the quarterback of this football team. I call him 'Andy Panda' and we have a little 'love you, fuck you' thing going on. If we're in a serious scene and we're together, I'll whisper in his ear, 'Fuck you,' and he'll come back, 'No, fuck you,' and we kind of throw those things at each other. It's funny 'cause Andrew is very diplomatic — he has a lot of couth, as they say, and I do not. If I don't like something I start tipping tables over and he's like, 'Norman, relax, let me handle this.'"

So maybe this is the final reason. Seventy-five episodes in, with the ever-present threat of death-by-zombie all around, battling sweltering heat, keeping spoilers at bay, whispering sweet nothings in each other's ears, there's a palpable sense that the cast and crew wouldn't have it any other way. It's the end of the world as we know it, and they feel fine.

THE WALKING DEAD **RETURNS TO FOX ON FEBRUARY 15 AT 9PM.**

The Devil Zone

THE WALKING DEAD CREATOR ROBERT KIRKMAN HAS A NEW SHOW COMING, WHICH PROMISES TO DO FOR DEMONS WHAT HIS FIRST ONE'S DONE FOR ZOMBIES



HAVING COME UP WITH ONE WORLD-CONQUERING formula, Robert Kirkman is hoping to repeat the feat with a very different kind of horror series. Shooting in and around the small southern town of Rock Hill, exorcism drama *Outcast* is the latest comic-book adaptation from the creator of *The Walking Dead*. It sees Patrick Fugit (*Almost Famous*) as the disturbed Kyle Barnes, whose life has been plagued by demonic possession in those close to him. Reluctantly, as he tries to trace a path back to normality, he finds himself partnered with Reverend Anderson (*Life On Mars*' Philip Glenister), a lifelong demon-hunter who is starting to question his own powers.

Ridiculously busy with both these shows and their respective comic books, as well *Walking Dead* spin-off *Fear The Walking Dead*, Kirkman isn't on set when *Empire* visits, but this is still very much his baby. "Our inspiration is the comics," explains executive producer Chris Black, whose CV is littered with hits ranging from *Ugly Betty* to *Mad Men*. "It's Robert's vision, Robert's take. His mantra for the show is this: don't think of it as a horror show, think of it as a character show with horrific elements."

Wrenn Schmidt, who plays Kyle's adoptive sister, Megan, explains the show's inspiration. "Robert was saying to us that exorcism in film was always dealt with on a one-case basis: 'Somebody's possessed! Let's exorcise them! Awesome! We're done here, case solved, case closed.' And he said even that's only been done well a few times. What if it's something that recurs and needs to be dealt with on a larger scale. What does that look like?"

Unsurprisingly, Kirkman's stock is high in these parts, with cast and crew daring to hope that his ability to riff on a familiar movie theme and transform it into TV gold will pay off once again. Having missed out on *The Walking Dead*, HBO, in the form of its subsidiary Cinemax, didn't delay in commissioning the series.

"The source material is so great," enthuses Black. "If you look at shows like *The Walking Dead* and *Game Of Thrones* there's one vision behind them, one storyteller who knows where they are going."

Said storyteller in *Outcast*'s case has also been very clear in the direction he's given at least one cast member.

"The one thing he said to me was, 'Don't fuck it up!'" laughs Patrick Fugit. "'I'm planning on seven years of this, so don't fuck it up!' That's Robert being enthusiastic..."

OUTCAST **IS COMING TO FOX LATER THIS YEAR.**



THE DARKE

HOW GOTHAM CITY'S HERO BECAME THE MAN OF STEEL IN ZACK SNYDER'S



ST KNIGHT

THE 'BAD GUY' FACING OFF AGAINST EPIC CLASH OF THE ICONS

WORDS IAN NATHAN

ZACK SNYDER REMEMBERS THE MOMENT HE TOLD CHRISTOPHER NOLAN ABOUT BATMAN BEING A BAD GUY.



Ben Affleck's world-weary crime-fighter unmasked.

"You'll tell me if you don't want me to do it," the *Man Of Steel* director, as animated as Nolan is composed, had implored his executive producer. The silence grew, until finally the *Dark Knight* mastermind said, "Well, we don't own these characters. When you're done making Batman movies, someone else will [make them]."

"I think at first he found it a little bit hard,'" Snyder admits. "I would feel the same way."

Nolan, of course, had been responsible for the second coming of the Dark Knight. So smart and uncompromising was Nolan's trilogy, it set *Batman* apart as something more dramatically concrete than any other comic-book adaptation. For many it felt like the final word. One of them had been Snyder, who had used Nolan's bracing blueprint as the means to make Superman relevant to a modern audience in 2013's *Man Of Steel*.

Yet, when it came to the sequel, Snyder reconsidered. Maybe Nolan's take wasn't the final word. Perhaps Superman offered Batman a new beginning. Snyder could now embrace the entire DC Universe, and that meant pitting the two against each other in a truly titanic clash. Only now he had secured Nolan's blessing, he needed to find a way to stay true to his much-celebrated, down-to-Earth version, while also moving it forward into a world that's also home to a displaced alien with godlike powers. And, crucially, he had to find the right Batman.

BEN AFFLECK HAD JUST

won an Oscar, for *Argo*. He was due to start David Fincher's hot-button thriller *Gone Girl*, and had his next directorial outing lined up with Warner Bros., a period gangster thriller called *Live By Night*. What was he doing reading for Batman?

"I probably was at the point of having, maybe, the most opportunities I've ever had in my career," he says. "And then this Batman thing came along."

He was immediately taken aback by the counter-intuitive concept: an older Batman plays villain to Superman, with the two grand edifices of the genre going toe-to-toe. Moreover, Chris Terrio, who had written *Argo* for him, was being brought in to pen the script. Not exactly Mr. Comic-Book Guy, Terrio had an instinct for what was provocative and original. This would be neither a sequel nor an origin story; neither a Batman nor a Superman film. "And, quite frankly, I thought there was probably not going to be another chance to be in a movie like this," Affleck admits.

His legacy in the superhero arena is mixed. His 2003 *Daredevil* was neither provocative nor original. Fans cite it as a prime example of how star power can wilt superpowers. More pertinently, Affleck donned Superman togs in *Hollywoodland* as George Reeves, the doomed actor who played the fly-boy on '50s television.

Snyder walked Affleck through the vision, revealing his promise of a DC Universe to unfold into the future. This wasn't a one-shot deal, he said. Get it right, and he could be Batman for years to come. After all, he's supposed to be a little chewed at the corners, being 20 years into his Bat-career, with his classic foes safely bound in Arkham Asylum (that is, before the Suicide Squad gets to work), and Robin long gone. His only true companion remains dogged Alfred (here played by Jeremy Irons).

Not that anyone had yet told Superman. "I only work here," Henry Cavill sort-of jokes. He'd once been seated next to Affleck at some awkward Oscar bash, and they'd had a "normal







laugh". So when he heard it was Affleck he might soon be punching, he got excited: "Ben's great. I knew I would have a good time with him."

Other names had been in the mix. Snyder had looked at the sturdy likes of Josh Brolin and Richard Armitage, but made it clear it was Affleck's for the taking. Even if the actor may have harboured doubts.

His tone switches into honest-to-God. "I recognise that it was a big risk. But I felt like directing was a risk, and I've taken risks that haven't worked. Taking that big swing on something like this was just the sort of thing I wanted to do rather than be complacent." Leaping from tall buildings, metaphorically or otherwise: it's character-building.

ULTIMATELY, IT WAS THE

sculpture that sealed the deal. Affleck had seen the artwork in Snyder's Pasadena office when he had first arrived to talk over the big idea. "Superman locked in battle with Batman, and Superman grabbing Batman's gun and breaking it," recalls Affleck. "I thought, 'This is the best version of this movie you could make.'" He also clocked it was an image lifted directly from *The Dark Knight Returns*.

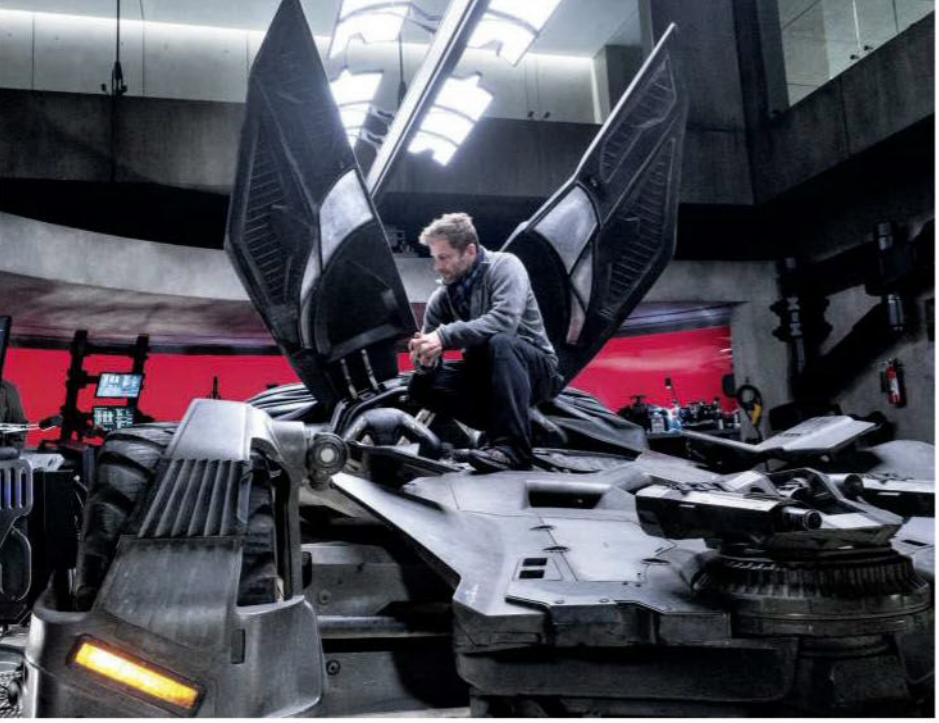
In cultural terms, Frank Miller's 1986 miniseries is the *Moby Dick* of comic books. The Great American Graphic Novel contorting the clean moral lines of DC's drugstore heroics, redefining Batman as an existential crack-up. If it was a key inspiration for both Burton and Nolan, it was the Bible for Snyder.

Clockwise from top: The new-look Batman with Spaghetti Western duster; Zack Snyder gets down to a little light car maintenance; Our grieving hero, who you'd think might be able to afford fancier flowers; *Mano a Supermano* with Henry Cavill's Kal-El.

"I'm a fanatic," he boasts.

Affleck likes to think he is from that last generation who knew Batman or Superman first as comic books. He'd read them growing up in the Boston suburbs, he knows the soup-to-nuts of Batman's inception: writer Bob Kane and artist Bill Finger creating him back in 1939 for the embryonic DC, another makeweight-in-a-mask to satiate the demand in the wake of Superman.

And he loved how *The Dark Knight Returns* gave him a second life. Darker, older, more subversive: a 55 year-old Batman creeps out of retirement to check the rising tide of crime, accompanied by a female, teenaged Robin, but his methods come under suspicion from Superman, leading to a royal scrap. Snyder's approach would be to rewire Nolan's pitiless style





back into the comic-book canon. Of which *The Dark Knight Returns*, if not the source, was certainly the muse.

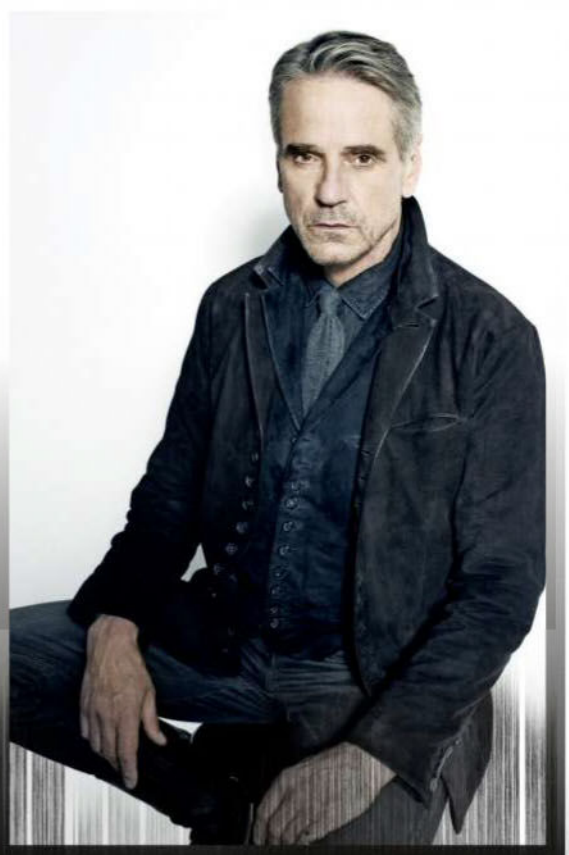
"The essential thing in any storytelling is to surprise the audience," Affleck insists: give the fans something they *didn't know* they wanted. "There have been seven Batman movies [since 1989]. It is hard to find a new angle on that. I've had the chance to do something really fresh with this character."

Then, right on cue, like a gaudy supervillain crashing the ball, there came The Backlash. To ready him, Warner Bros. had offered shock therapy, pulling out reams of archived abuse meted out to previous incumbents of the Batcave. In 1989, when Tim Burton announced Keaton as his Caped Crusader, 50,000 letters littered the Warner Bros. mailroom protesting this madness. And sure enough, down rained the Twitter-jibes about Matt Damon as Robin, while an online appeal to the White House petition system requested to make it illegal for Affleck to play Batman (or any superhero) on film for the next 200 years.

"I saw the announcement," laughs Affleck. "I look down on the first comment... It just goes, *'Noooooooooo!'*"

NOLAN AND BALE MAY HAVE

laid out a map for interpreting Batman in a tangible way, but Affleck is adamant there are few direct comparisons. "If I thought we were just doing a sequel to the Christian Bale movies, I wouldn't have done it," he states emphatically.



THE NEW ALFRED

JEREMY IRONS IS A DISCTINCTLY MORE ACTIVE PENNYWORTH...

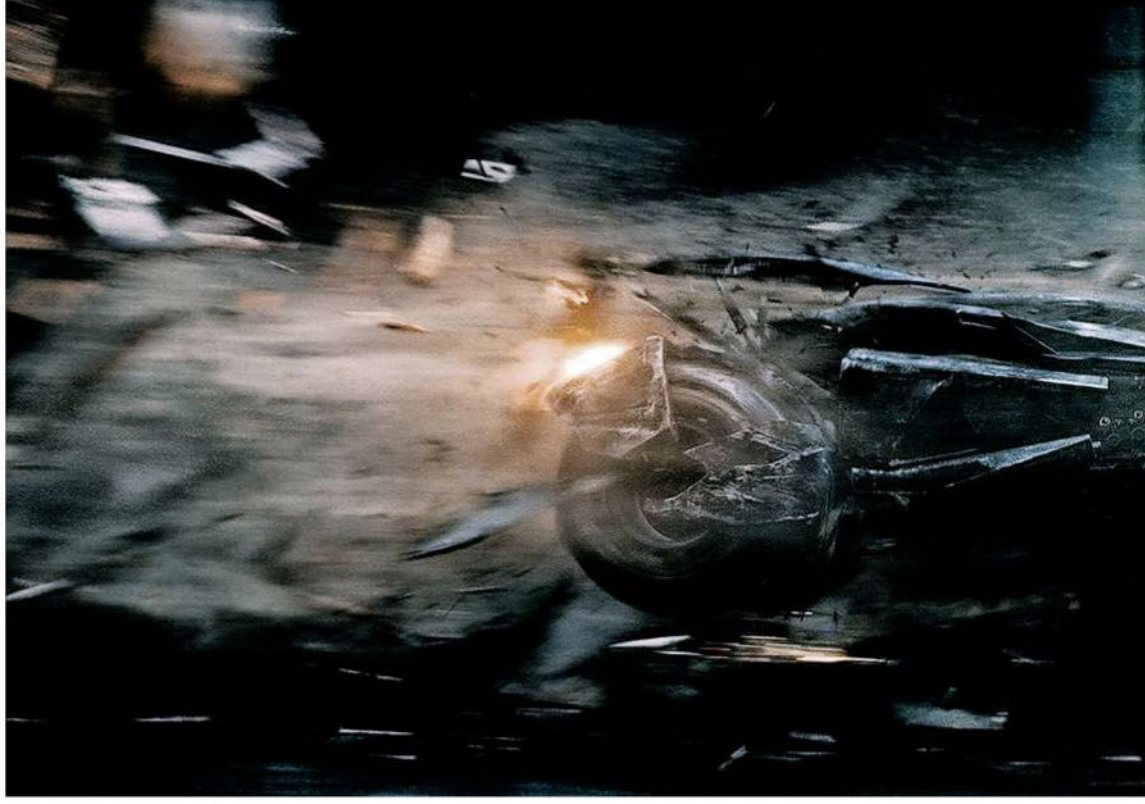
"I KNEW WE WOULD BE FINDING A DIFFERENT angle on Alfred," says Jeremy Irons, who wants to make it clear he very much enjoyed both the Michael Caine and Michael Gough versions of Bruce Wayne's famous sidekick, equal parts butler, coach and Sancho Panza. "So I thought of him as my own."

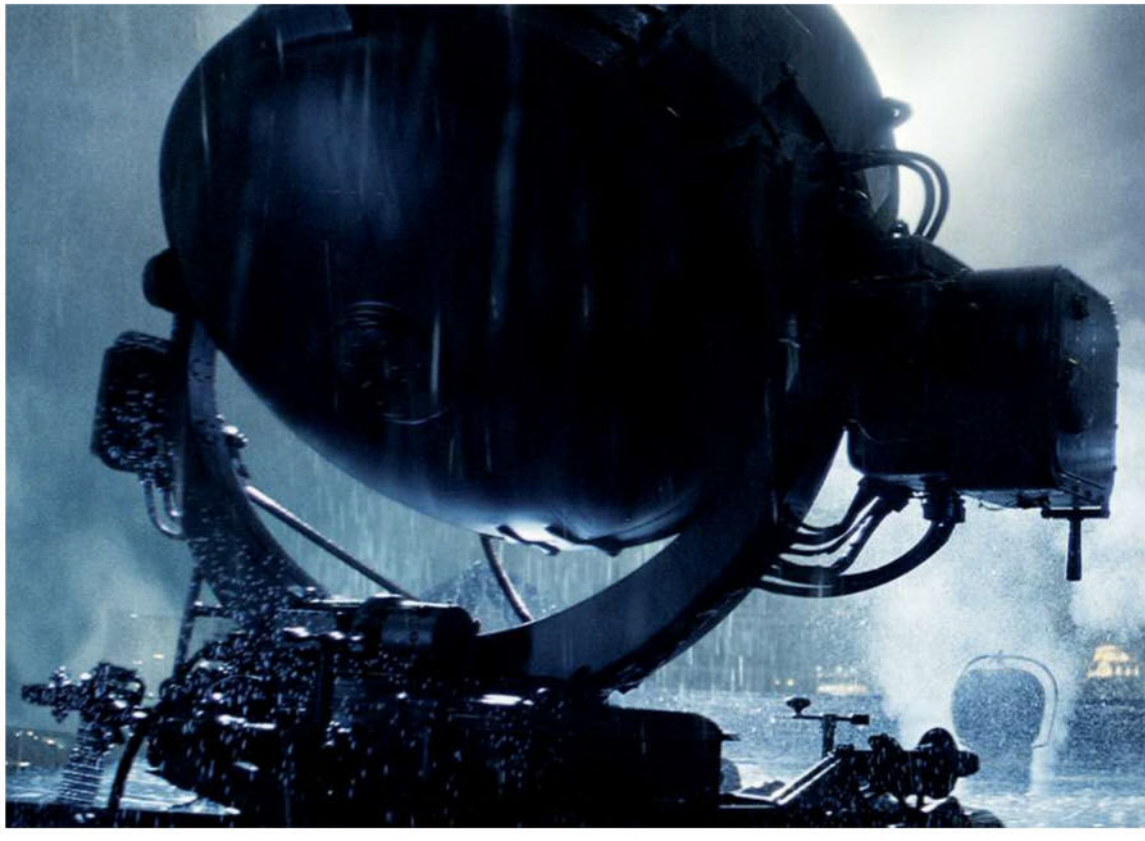
Well-spoken, wise, notably English, and the steadying force in Batman's complex life: at first sight you wonder exactly what this different angle could be. In keeping with the MO established by those two refined vets, Irons' Alfred Pennyworth is as much surrogate parent as manservant to both the billionaire and his vigilante alter ego. "Alfred has lived longer than Bruce, and so perhaps has a clearer perspective on life," muses the 67 year-old actor. "As well as having been *in loco parentis* to Bruce, his only remit in life is to protect him. And, as those of us who have raised children, let alone Batmen, will know, that is quite a wide remit."

That "remit" now involves a markedly different situation. Wayne Manor is a burnt-out husk, and he and his charge now live in a sleek lakeside residence.

There are also Snyder-fuelled hints of a more significant past. Alfred has talents beyond polishing the silver or playing mission control, including a particular set of special-ops skills. While he fulfills his duties as butler "when required", he will be more "hands-on". "He's a man who can actually do anything if he has to," says Irons, suggesting he may be in the thick of the action.

According to Ben Affleck, Irons' Alfred also offers more humour than previous Pennyworths, playing to Irons' droll delivery. "There is a lot of wit," Affleck says of their byplay. "Batman is such a serious guy, Bruce Wayne is such a serious guy; it's nice to have a foil. Because we are going for this more realistic tone, we have to avoid being glib, but that wry, British sense of humour is in a lot of ways about taking the piss."





"They exist as three great movies but on their own, and I also wouldn't be comfortable with saying, 'We're gonna one-up that.' What I'm interested in is that we're doing something different."

Affleck's really connected with the idea that his Batman has been through the mill: he's seen success, he's seen failure; he's had the right intentions, and at times been misunderstood. "Sort of feeling at the end of one's tether..." he concludes. "I'm really well suited to play this guy." Can it be that the chief inspiration for Affleck's Dark Knight is Ben Affleck?

You can see it in Bruce Wayne, still the billionaire operator with a supermodel for every occasion, but greying at the temples and heavy of heart. "It is a cover, one that works well for him," is how Affleck interprets his other role, "but it is also one that is not a total fake; it's a part of him." Wayne and Batman are extensions of the same complex persona.

Which counts for the Bat-voice too. Keaton did him funeral recital, Clooney cheesed off, Bale's was a psychotic Tom Waits, each a vocalisation of an alternative personality. For Affleck's Batman the voice is as much a tool as the Batmobile. "In our film," says producer Deborah Snyder, "Batman's voice is digitally altered by the cowl."

Affleck has also embraced Snyder's desire for living sculptures, from the pecs of *300* to Cavill's own chiselled physique in *Man Of Steel*. He stops to make the calculation: over the past year he must have worked out over 700 times. And at 43, he's not getting any younger. "But you really see the physicality of Batman," he says. Gone are the days of Adam West's muffin top. Still, the thought of doing *The Justice League*, at 45, causes a wince.

But before any last-act Bat/Supes bromance instigates the DC Avengers, the more immediate issue is how can he possibly hope to bring a superhuman like Kal-El to heel? Will a battle-ready Batmobile and heavyweight Bat-weapons be enough? Or the veritable Batcave of exotic gear they've developed for the man in black: Bat-grappling hook, Bat-grenade launcher, Batarang and Bat-scanner.

Flicking through a book of concept art on set, the spoiler-police hasten *Empire* past pictures where this Bat-arsenal has clearly been married to a lime-green glow. It's enough to suggest that unlike *Man Of Steel*'s aerial final conflict, this fight will primarily take place on terra firma, rolling around in the grit. This may be less about Batman trying to empower himself to reach Superman's level than bringing the latter down to his own. As Snyder puts, "It's kind of nice Batman has no superpowers..."

JULY 31, 2014, AND *EMPIRE*

finds Ben Affleck primed for his super-scrap. He's Bat-armoured to the gills, raccoon-eyed, and chomping loudly on an apple. Yet it's another epic cinematic struggle that concerns him right now: between bites, he's discussing with Zack Snyder the merits of Film V Digital. For the record, like Nolan, Snyder is a film zealot, deploying fridge-sized IMAX cameras, painted Bat-black for the occasion. It's another way in which continuity from the *Dark Knight* trilogy is being preserved.

Top: Kapow! The Batmobile, never more souped-up. **Above:** The Bat-signal lights the sky as the city of Gotham finds itself in an unprecedented crisis.

We are in video village, tented against the desert sun like a Bedouin encampment, and the friendly debate is interrupted when three heralds from the costume department arrive bearing the cowl on a tray. Affleck greets them with a pantomime grimace: "Oh, fuck off!" Snyder and DP Larry Fong break into gales of schoolboy laughter as the costume techs, unfazed, begin the transformation.

Today everyone is wearing masks, protection against the sawdust being blown into frenzies by industrial-sized fans. Affleck smirks. He may wear the





famous cowl, but his contract doesn't guarantee protection against his director's artistic choices (it's in the small print). As the mask is finally lowered into place, there is an evident split down the back: unseen by the camera this will facilitate Henry Cavill's Superman ripping the cowl free to reveal Affleck as Bruce Wayne beneath; a startling moment you will have seen in the last trailer.

This, it is explained, is a dream sequence. The look of which, thrillingly, is pure *Mad Max*, as Batman, clad in a calf-length Spaghetti Western-style duster and shouldering a machine-gun, walks unbowed through the blizzard to greet an armoured juggernaut pulling up in a desert compound that's walled with rusty containers. We've never seen the Dark Knight look quite like this, yet it feels no less rooted in reality than the previous three Bat-movies.

Empire overhears that we are in "Kandahar" (in fact Oxford, Michigan, about 30 minutes north of Detroit), so it appears that real-world politics provides a backdrop to super-politics. This is not *Batman Forever*, this is Batman for real.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE BATMAN INSIGNIA

ILLUSTRATIONS **POP CHART LAB**



1943
***Batman* serial**



1949
***Batman And Robin* serial**



1966
Batman: The Movie



1977
***The New Adventures Of Batman* animated TV series**



1989
Batman



1992
Batman Returns



1995
Batman Forever



1997
Batman & Robin



1997
***The New Batman Adventures* animated series**



1999
***Batman Beyond* animated series**



2004
***The Batman* animated series**



2005
Batman Begins



2008/2012
The Dark Knight/ The Dark Knight Rises



2008
***Batman: The Brave And The Bold* animated series**



2016
Batman v Superman: Dawn Of Justice

ONCE THE DUST HAS settled, Snyder tells us that, deep down, he believes he is making a relationship movie. "In a lot of ways *Batman v Superman* is a very personal concept," he insists. "It is just two people trying to understand each other's points of view."

Terrio's script presents a scenario where we find Bruce Wayne confronted by the consequences of the "Black Zero" event — the in-world sobriquet for the Superman V Zod battle that ran amok through the last reel of *Man Of Steel*. Something Snyder's first Superman film had been criticised for — presenting all this CG carnage without blinking a super-eyelid. "What you didn't see at the end of that movie was the effect that had on the whole world," counters Affleck. "It's an acknowledgement that with violence and destruction there is real human cost. What do you do with that?"

More to the point, Wayne Enterprises got caught up in the carnage, with good people lost — people Bruce Wayne knew personally, people he could call family. That feeds an anger and a resentment, real-world cause-and-effect working a salutary echo of 9/11, instead of, say, a droll megalomaniac robot. Batman may not be coming from an entirely stable place. Furthermore, there is the whole dilemma about unchecked power. Affleck compares Batman's thinking to a Dick Cheney rationale: "If there is a one per cent chance that Superman is going to cause death in his being here, it has to be treated like an absolute certainty."

Superman, meanwhile, considers Batman's whole judge-and-jury ethic to be little better than the crime he's supposedly fighting. "The idea of justice at any cost is not something that he thinks is okay," asserts Cavill, "but he wants to solve the problem in the cleanest way possible."

Batman is willing to go 'The Chicago Way' (an appropriate *Untouchables* reference, given Metropolis was filmed in the Windy City). Vigilantism has always been part of his edgy pathology — it's what put down the Joker and those other psychotic clowns. It gets results. So, using whatever means he has available, or might be made available by interested third parties, Batman will stop at nothing to stop Superman. As Affleck admits, "It is quite natural that he be the one to cross the line." After all, he's the bad guy.

THE LEX FACTOR

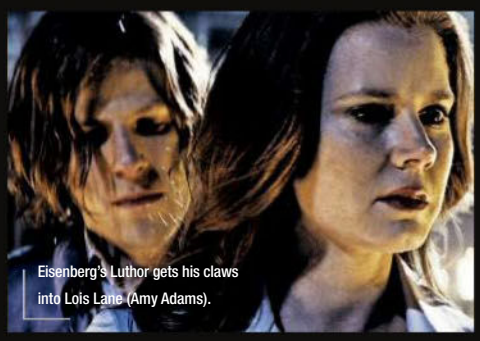
WHY JESSE EISENBERG IS THE IDEAL LUTHOR FOR THE NU-GEEK GENERATION

PORTRAIT MARC HOM

WHO SPRINGS TO MIND AS LEX LUTHOR, BIG-brained DC mega-bad with a serious Superman itch to scratch? Gene Hackman's calculating smarm-bucket from the Richard Donner era? Kevin Spacey's acidic Dr. Evil from the Bryan Singer reboot? That forgotten guy in TV's *Smallville* who played him with a cod-Freudian backdraft of daddy issues?

For Zack Snyder, it was Mark Zuckerberg. When it came to reinterpreting Superman's archnemesis for his feel-the-real DC aesthetic, the director was looking for a titan of business in a more right-now mould than the hairless Machiavellians of yesteryear. So he cast Jesse Eisenberg.

"Just from a pop-cultural view you can't pretend the movie doesn't exist," Snyder says, meaning *The Social Network*, in which Eisenberg transformed the Facebook billionaire into an icy, tormented Citizen Kane. "Because he has played Mark Zuckerberg, Jesse represents a very contemporary sort of business model. In the sort of post-dotcom world where fortunes can be made from your basement, it is not hard to imagine Jesse-as-Lex being as powerful as he is."



Eisenberg's Luthor gets his claws into Lois Lane (Amy Adams).

The 32 year-old Eisenberg naturally fusses over so straight a comparison. "If there are some surface similarities to another role, an audience will tend to see that. An actor won't." As he points out, for the first years of his rise to prominence as actor, writer, novelist and *New Yorker* contributor, he was pegged as a nouveau Woody Allen. After *The Social Network*, it was why the arrogant S.O.B.s all the time? Though, says Eisenberg, "for me, Lex feels like a totally new and unusual person."

Totally: the voice is Mickey Mouse impersonating Hannibal Lecter, the hair is pre-bleach Kurt Cobain, the age a callow 31, but the big plan is straight out of the old-school puppet-master playbook.

Snyder had met with Eisenberg for another role (was he to be Robin, or a youthful spin on Alfred?) and it just occurred to the director, "What about Jesse for Lex?" Snyder was well aware how hard it was going to be to shake Hackman's camp wickedness, and Eisenberg felt dangerous to him in a "purely intellectual way".

The New York-born actor's initial response was that this was surely some clerical error; then he read the script. "It was written in a way I would say dovetails with my skills, it was written with a real psychological underpinning, it was written with a kind of humour that I knew I could do. And with a dramatic intensity that I enjoy."

Put this Luthor on the couch and you'll unearth no daddy issues but a far more terrifying psyche. He is a young man with two faces. Front-facing is the disarming, witty, Metropolis charmer. "He uses wordplay and very clever allusions to other stories and other myths," says Eisenberg, "but it never compromises what is scary about him." Which is the other private face: "full of rage". What he might lack in superpowers he makes up for in dark determination. "He is the guy who won't sleep to get something done."

With the DC-expansion in play, Luthor has been infused with some of the nuttier traits of Bat-villainy: the wisecracking psychopathology of the Joker, the self-satisfied clever-clogsiness of the Riddler, and the big-picture scheming of the Penguin. Eisenberg credits writer Chris Terrio with providing an elaborate, off-limits backstory, and the mechanics of Luthor's plan come top of the non-disclosure list. Still, we know that initially he shares Batman's concerns over the value and danger of a creature like Superman. "What, I think, makes the story relevant is this questioning of the value of this kind of power in the real world," says Eisenberg intently. "So my character, who has what we would think of as modern financial success, is threatened by this guy who has power in a supernatural way. Superman is an existential threat to my character."

With Kal-El and Bruce Wayne preoccupied by their philosophical spat, Luthor plays the situation to his advantage. "You learn pretty early on that Lex is interested in metahuman existence," notes Snyder, "and that there might be some relationship between that investigation and the appearance of Diana Prince (*aka Wonder Woman*)." Luthor also liberates Zod's body, and somehow his scheming spells the arrival of Doomsday (the film's *other* other villain) and sacrificing that impressive mane for the obligatory Luthor-look. Could it be that the close proximity to Kryptonite is a contributory factor?

"I can't really reveal the circumstances because not only will I lose my own hair I will lose my house, but it is *so* unusual," skitters Eisenberg, admitting he found it a stimulating experience. "To me there is nothing better than to be able to physicalise something in a role because you can't fake it. It really helps to lose yourself in the part." Batman v Superman v Jesse Eisenberg is starting to feel like a fair match.





ALL THE WORLD'S

WAITING FOR YOU

GAL GADOT TAKES ON THE SUPERHERO ROLE THAT'S ELUDED SO MANY OTHERS FOR SO MANY YEARS: WONDER WOMAN

WORDS **IAN NATHAN** PORTRAIT **MARC HOM**

THERE WAS A TIME WHEN IT FELT LIKE IT WAS ALL ANYONE TALKED ABOUT IN HOLLYWOOD:



Gal Gadot's Wonder Woman leading the superhero pack in *Batman V Superman: Dawn Of Justice.*



who would star as Wonder Woman, the superhero bound for the big screen just as soon as Warner Bros. could get its screenplay in order? Sandra Bullock was a cert back in 1999. In 2001, it was Beyoncé; no, wait, it was Angelina Jolie, Catherine Zeta-Jones or Megan Fox; no, no, it was definitely Rachel Bilson. Lucy Lawless claimed she once turned the part down in favour of *Xena*, the own-brand version.

Enter Joss Whedon, creator of *Buffy*. In 2005, he was the perfect choice to bring a glint of irony to the super-heroine with her lasso of truth and bullet-deflecting bracelets. Sensibly, he said he wouldn't cast until he had written a script. Shame, then, he didn't finish one. Warner Bros. didn't click with his vision, and leaving the project two years later he said, "The lack of enthusiasm was overwhelming."

With so many other comic-book adaptations bounding to the screen, what was the problem with Wonder Woman? Perhaps, thought Zack Snyder, they were leaping before they could run. For his DC expansion he was already willing to have Batman be a co-star, so why not Wonder Women too? Introduce her as a supporting character first. "It was incredibly organic how Wonder Woman came into the story, says Snyder. "The whole concept came of, 'Let's not save anything. Let's try it all.' Then Wonder Woman's entrance made us realise we were much closer to the Justice League than we thought. We realised we were one movie away."

But he knew he had to get the casting precisely right, and find an actor who could truly own the role that so many before her had been denied.

AT HER FIRST AUDITION, GAL

Gadot had no idea it was for Wonder Woman. She had been told it was a very big role for an unnamed Warner Bros. project, directed by Zack Snyder. "I mean, I could have guessed," she admits now, sitting in *Batman v Superman*'s temporary boardroom. "I thought it was going to be Selina, you know?" But Selina Kyle, or Catwoman, will be the subject of other reinventions and casting rumours.

The search had been extensive, right across the globe, but they tested only five actors in the end. All of them, according to producer Deborah Snyder, were "amazing". She is far too professional to mention other names, but both Olga Kurylenko and French actress Elodie Yung were mentioned in *Variety*. If Batman was going to come freighted with celebrity, Wonder Woman should be moulded around a new personality, to be found beyond America's borders. Thirty year-old former model Gadot certainly fits the bill: she spent two years in the Israel Defense Forces and six more in the *Fast And Furious* franchise.

"I only knew what role it was when I flew in to test with Ben (*Affleck*)," she says. "I was very excited. Anytime I had general meetings in LA, I always said that my dream role was to do an empowered, independent woman who doesn't rely on men." And here was the super-sized version of that.

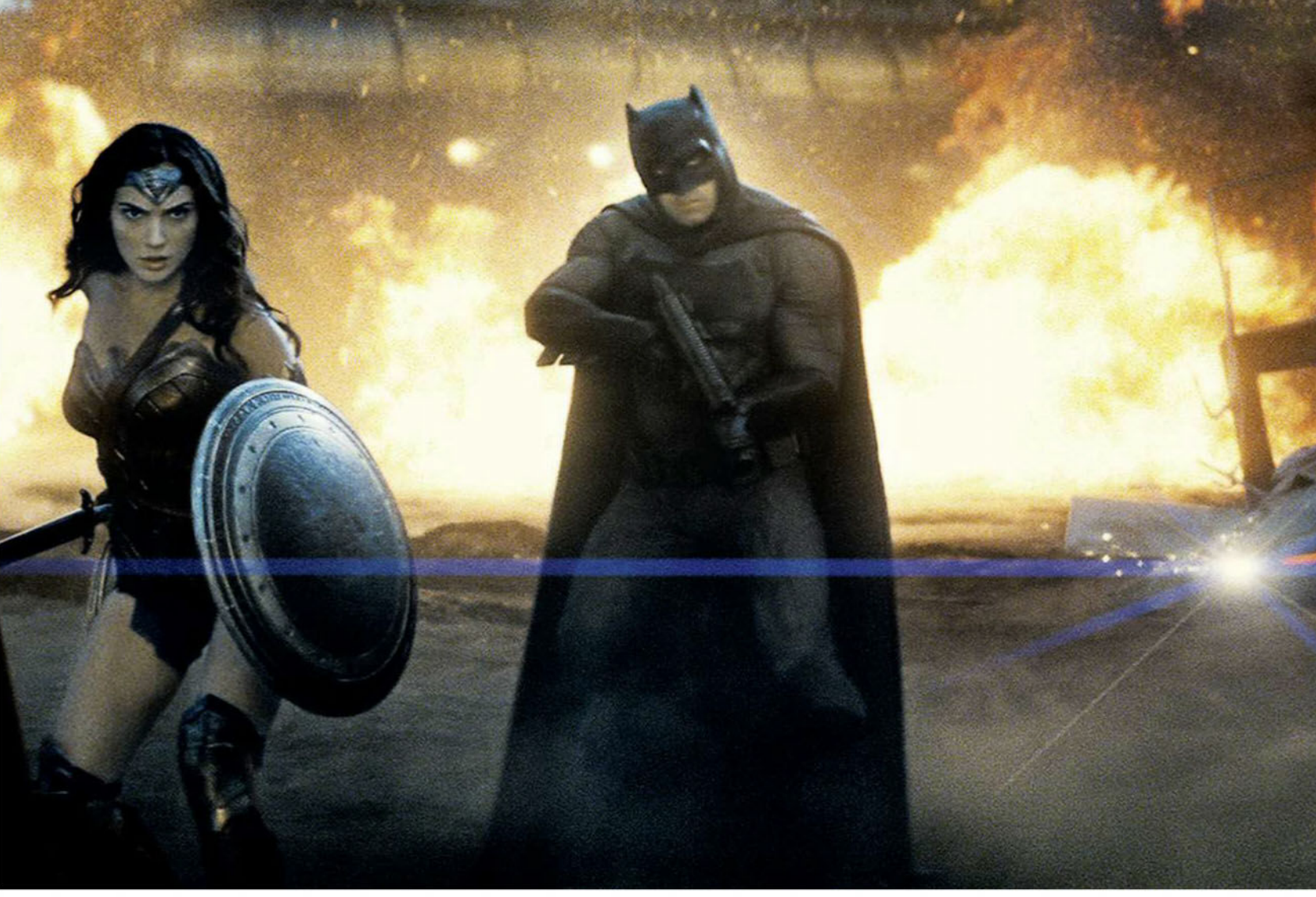
It wasn't just about finding the best actor to wear the costume on screen. As with Henry Cavill as Superman, it was about finding someone who could embody Wonder Woman while just walking down the street; if a young fan met them, they'd only see the character, not the actress. "She just has this magical quality," says Deborah Snyder, who considers Gadot to have all the qualities required of the part: the wit, determination and wisdom.

Although, when it came to the particulars, Gadot had to catch up fast. Wonder Woman, by day Diana Prince, was created in 1940 when the wife of psychologist-turned-comic book-writer William Moulton Marston suggest he try a female superhero who fought crime with love. Over the years she became a DC staple refined, elaborated upon and made tougher.

Using Greek mythology as the backbone to her backstory, she was born Princess Diana of Themyscira, an Amazonian warrior with superhuman strength and athleticism, and a golden lasso. In some comic-book strands she is the daughter of Zeus. How all this will be recalibrated for the reality-determined context set up in *Man Of Steel* remains elusive, though Gadot confirms that when it comes to inborn talent, her metahuman heals quickly, jumps to heights where she is almost flying and can really pack a punch.

She is also over 5,000 years old. "Because she's seen it all," says Gadot, "she has seen what humans can do, so it was very hard for her to come back and fight." As the wheels of *Batman v Superman* begin to turn, Diana Prince is in retirement, the superhero game a thing of her extended past. So she adds another colour to the DC palette: Superman is growing into maturity, Batman is looking to call it quits, and Wonder Woman will be forced out of retirement. There are none of the geek-empowerment clichés that service the Marvel machine.

Likewise, Diana Prince is not an alter ego but a reflection of the same person. "They have the same attitude," explains Gadot. "Although when she is Diana she tries to blend in, she is not too outgoing." Albeit blending in at glamorous galas in Gotham, attended by Bruce Wayne. "I don't want people to think she is perfect," insists the actress. "She can be naughty."





GADOT HAS TRULY

committed herself to this journey, going through seven-and-a-half months of training before she set foot on set. She was always the tallest girl in class, and skinny, but now she feels different — more capable. "I am holding my body in a different way," she says. There has been martial arts training, and a lot of sword work. "I was a dancer for 12 years," she says, unable to believe how lucky she is to be able to parlay all that experience into a film role, "and now I get paid to work out and do crazy stuff with a lasso."

Wonder Woman shows off her impenetrable bracelets. Not available at H. Samuel.

Arguably, the biggest hurdle in recreating Wonder Woman was the '70s TV series starring Lynda Carter: beloved but cheesy as hell. Gadot was too young to know much about Carter, but the Snyders recognised that Wonder Woman presented as much of a challenge as an opportunity. How do you skirt the silliness? There are hints of Carter's iconic if revealing stars-and-stripes leotard in their more muted leather armour, and the danger is that she becomes another male fantasy, a crime-fighting vixen with ample flesh on show.

"Her sexuality is part of her power, but she is also a feminist icon," contends Deborah Snyder. "Gender has been a hot topic, so it is very timely to bring her back. The way we have approached it, especially in the stand-alone movie, that is definitely there." Their Wonder Woman is fully empowered, upbraiding the titular heroes for clobbering one another. She presents the perfect opportunity to not only laugh at the men, but the entire superhero situation. It's an idea really coming to fruition in the solo *Wonder Woman*, currently shooting in London and Italy.

As Snyder explains, "Looking back and doing an origin story — and it is a period piece — we see the role of women through history. There is a great source of humour in that now. It is so unbelievable, you can't even fathom it. You are still making a statement, but having some fun with it."



THE BRIGH

WITH BATMAN TO BATTLE, AND NEW RISING, HENRY CAVILL TACKLES THE



HTEST DAY

HEROES – AND VILLAINS – CHALLENGE OF STAYING SUPER

WORDS IAN NATHAN

THERE HAD BEEN WHISPERINGS DURING THE PRESS TOUR FOR *MAN OF STEEL*.

Nothing official, so he could still put them down to mere Hollywood gossip, but Henry Cavill was getting a sense that the sequel to his debut as Superman wasn't going to be *Man Of Steel II*. "That was when they started talking about the nature of what the second movie may be," he remembers. "Or what could be called the first movie in *this* series..."

'Batman versus Superman' was what people were saying, and Cavill just thought, "Okay, that is interesting." Though he wasn't going to jump to any conclusions as to whether this was going to be a Batman movie or a Superman movie, or something else entirely.

Hard-edged yet still epic and fantastical, *Man Of Steel* had fulfilled director Zack Snyder's edict of depicting a 'what if?' scenario for Superman landing in the real world. But his thoughts for a sequel were taking a turn for the ambitious. Marvel was making hay by exploiting its full roster of superheroes, so why stick to just one superhero in this world, however Super? Snyder rearranged the equation: rather than just exploring what would happen when the real world is exposed to Superman, how about a real world where superheroes are already real? And what if they don't mix well?

When Cavill finally received the first draft by Chris Terrio, he got the point: this is the reaction to Superman revealing himself, the Kal-El V Zod showdown having served as the hero's devastating coming-out ball (while also a rehearsal for what was to come). "We see the reaction of Lex Luthor, and the reaction of Batman," says Cavill. "And the reaction of the whole world to this godlike being."

Which turns out to be hardly the most positive one.

HISTORICALLY, THE UNITED

States Congress is not to be found in Pontiac, Detroit. Yet here are the famous marble steps of the Capitol Building in a disused GM motor plant, crowned by a wall of green-screen (on which the building itself will emerge during post-production). A crowd of protestors has gathered at the foot of the stairs, hemmed in by barriers, and wielding placards emblazoned with scathing slogans: "This is our world not yours!", "God hates aliens!" and "Earth belongs to humans!"

As the particulars of the forthcoming shot are being fussed over, an assistant director orchestrates the anti-Superman ranting. "Let's give it something this time," he shouts. Louder still, the call comes for cameras to roll. Zack Snyder is located beneath a small canopy safely out of shot, clasping a microphone with which he transmits his commands. The protestors shake their billboards as if getting warmed up for a lynching. Squeezed into their midst, *Empire* spots Amy Adams as a fraught Lois Lane.

Bowed before them, like Rodin's Thinker, is the subject of their fury. Cavill's Superman has just landed at high velocity. Although the actual descent will be put in later with CGI, this is the finished pose, bracing the impact through his mighty thighs. In one fluid movement he rises to his feet and turns to face the crowd and its seething hatred. His expression is unreadable, but he's not smiling.

It is July 28, 2014, well over two months into production on *Batman v Superman: Dawn Of Justice*, the fourth major shoot to make its base at this pop-up studio which utilises a car factory left vacant in the wake of the financial desolation that wracked the city. The scale of its halls can match any soundstage, and on a brief tour *Empire* has seen the bones of the Bat-cave, a Batmobile repair shop and, built in what was once a parking lot, these Capitol steps.

Superman has come to face a senate committee, chaired by Holly Hunter's Senator Finch, to try and convince them he is not a threat to national security. "People have begun to fear him," says Cavill: "Is he too powerful? Is he, in fact, a tyrant?"



Henry Cavill's clean-cut superhero finds himself seemingly on the wrong side of right.







WHERE *MAN OF STEEL*

was an angst-heavy origin story, the expansion finds Superman confronting a backlash to the very concept of a superhero (and, it seems, taking an ironic dig at the genre's saturation of cinema in the process). While this Superman remains the illegitimate offspring of Christopher Nolan's hyper-real *Dark Knight* universe (even with a grizzled new Batman in town), there is also a sense that Zack Snyder is drawing this franchise closer to the pessimistic noir of his own *Watchmen*, which featured a dark spin on Superman in the nihilistic Dr. Manhattan and a bitter Batman-alike called Nite Owl.

For his part, Superman has come to terms with his purpose. He is now a saviour who recognises that he can hear everyone screaming for help, but he can't get to them all. "He's more used to this gig, doing his best to save as many lives as he can," explains Cavill, taking a break in his trailer. "He is no longer frantic. He's no longer a wet-behind-the-ears kind of superhero."

In the War On Terror era, superheroes have become super-metaphors to debate the uses and abuses of power in policing the world. "Can we really assume Superman will never turn on us?" teases Snyder. Frank Miller's 1986 comic-book masterpiece *The Dark Knight Returns*, Snyder's set text for his new film, had Superman as a government tool: a weapon of mass destruction with a red cape.

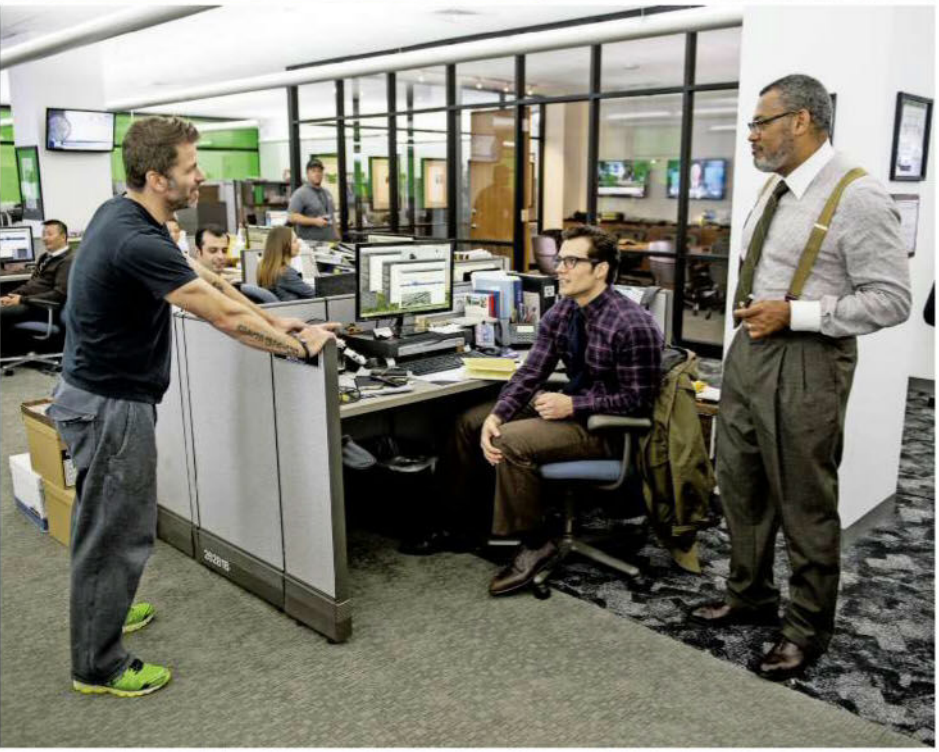
Snyder's older, wiser, bitter Batman, for one, thinks this golden boy has to be held accountable for what happened in Metropolis. "So it's about two heroes who can be seen as heroic and villainous," says Ben Affleck, "and when you look at the double-edged sword of that, different people will come away looking at it very differently."

Clockwise from top: A demonic-looking Kal-El leaves a trail of destruction; Mild-mannered alter ego Clark Kent grafting at the day job; Zack Snyder (left) shoots the breeze with Cavill and Laurence Fishburne (who plays Perry White) on set; Lex Luthor (Jesse Eisenberg) holds court with Supes and Bats (Ben Affleck).

IN A SENSE, THIS MOVIE IS

still a Superman story, it's just that it's not always seen through Superman's eyes. There is also Batman's cynical, biased gaze, the world's collective viewpoint (he's either a threat or a promise), the caring glance of Lois Lane, the warped surveillance of Lex Luthor. And also the bespectacled observation of Clark Kent, his ace reporting alter ego, trying to finagle





the *Daily Planet* into investigating this Batman scourge.

Cavill has relished the opportunity to develop his Clark side. If anything, the first film was an origin story for a Clark Kent who was unveiled in unassuming suit and square glasses only at the very end. "He is the human side of the character," he says, "but there is often this idea that Clark and Superman must be so different."

This is the modern, believable version of Clark: no tripping over tennis balls, no banging into elevator doors, no nudging slippery specs back up his nose. That beloved bumbling Reeve routine doesn't square with Snyder's shadowy enquiry into superhero ethics. Clark might radiate less power, but they are two points on a sliding scale of identity.

"He's being himself, only he's presenting a different front while he's in these different outfits," explains Cavill. Clark's trying *not* to draw attention to himself, hopefully giving a realistic basis for the concept of his true identity being hidden by only a pair of thick-rimmed specs.

"He can only get away with wearing glasses so much," admits Cavill, keen to uphold Snyder's logic. "If he's drawing attention to himself by being clumsy, that's not going to work." For the record: there is still the opportunity for humour, only more in a gallows style. "We don't want to be jokers," says Cavill.

There could be trouble in Eden, too. Clark and Adams' Lois have moved in together — an understated Metropolis apartment in marked contrast to



LOIS RETURNS

... AND SHE'S MORE TENACIOUS THAN EVER

IT'S BEEN A FEW YEARS SINCE *MAN OF STEEL*, but Lois Lane hasn't slowed down. She'll still stop at nothing to land the story. "She may have some tunnel vision, but she's got a job, moral standards," insists Amy Adams. "Though when we met her before she would do anything to get the story — now Clark has instilled some faith in humanity in her."

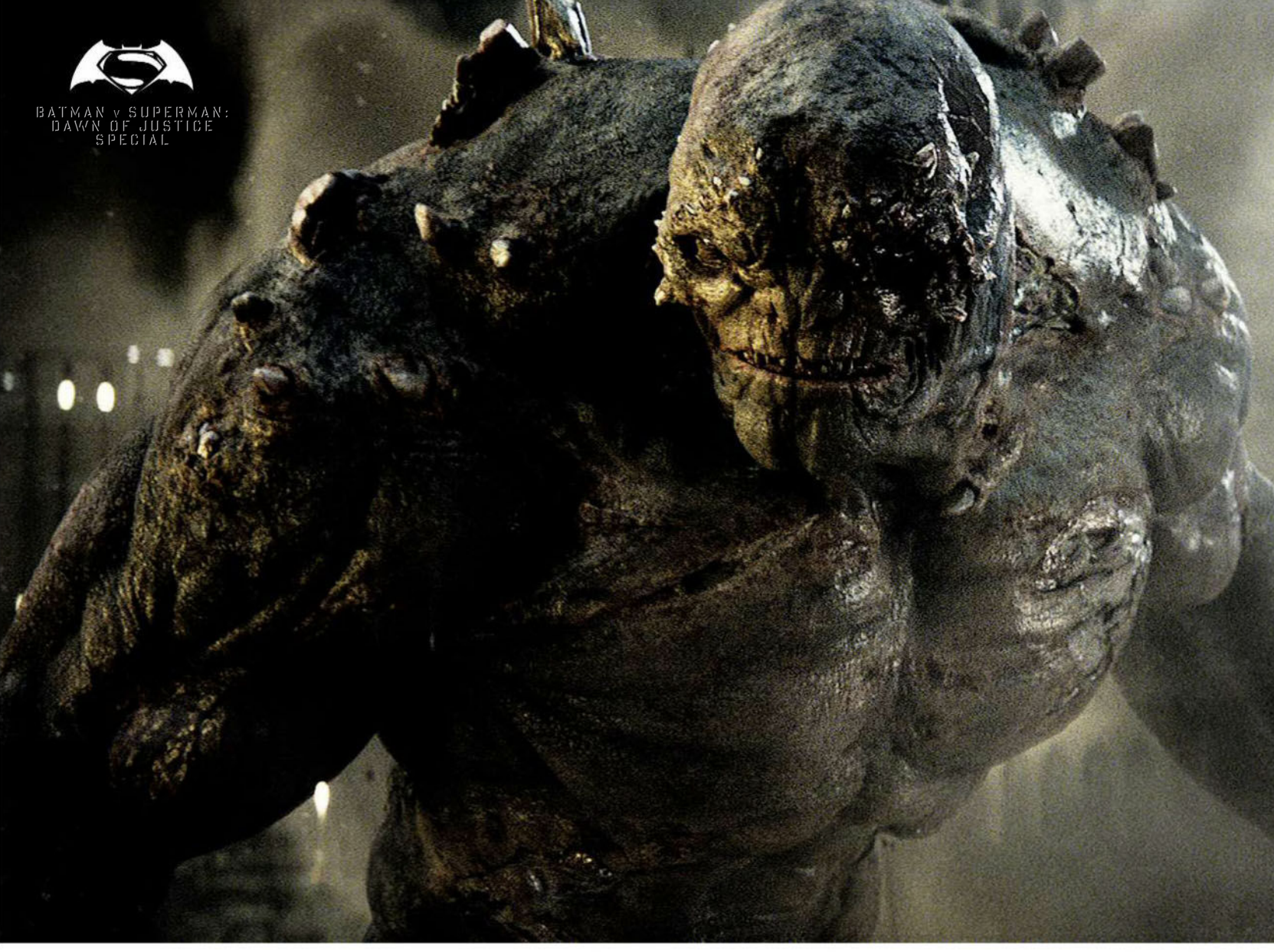
This morning on set, Adams has had her head tilted to the sky as her boyfriend descends to Earth in his more grandiose guise. "I think I start most scenes like that," she laughs. "Her relationship with Clark is the closest thing she has to anything faith-based, you know? Although moving in [with Clark] brings issues."

However, her priority is definitely the latest scoop. It could be that Lex Luthor is in her journalistic crosshairs this time. If the first film found space to ponder the state of journalism in the digital age, this new adventure takes a sidelong glance at how the media can be manipulated by the powerful. "How corporations can use the media," says Adams, "and different people can use media to spin perception."

It's a theme also reflected in the headlines the *Daily Planet* and *Gotham Free Press* run for and against their local heroes. Adams loves how Zack Snyder has widened the horizons of the sequel to encompass so much more of the DC universe, and while she has little interaction with Wonder Woman ("I am too busy sleuthing, but she definitely brings another dynamic"), she does get her Batman scene. "I've filmed part of it, it's a big moment," she says, one that involves plenty of "wirework and special-effects work".

And if the guys in tights are grabbing the front page, Lane serves a vital function amid their mayhem. Because Superman, as she puts it, is "100 per cent earnest", while Batman is "a little self-serious". Whereas Lois Lane is the one who is effectively saying, "*Really*?"

"She is the one asking the questions," Adams says proudly. "She speaks from an audience perspective."



Bruce Wayne's lonely Gotham mega-pad — but her fearless determination to get to the truth of any story is "messing" with Superman's agenda to become accepted by the rest of the world; it hardly looks good if he's prioritising rescuing her over any other human being, yet how can he not? Plus, points out Cavill, "It's not a normal relationship. How could it be? One of them is an alien."

Which is something Lex Luthor (Jesse Eisenberg) is very curious about. Traditionally Superman's nemesis, this movie is partly an origin story for their enmity. To begin with, Eisenberg's Luthor and Batman will be in cahoots against this Kryptonian godhead. "Clark knows who this Lex Luthor chap is," Cavill says, "but he certainly wouldn't assume that he had any bad intentions."

As for Batman? Well, there lies the rub. "Rather than just *Alien Vs. Predator*, where you have two monsters and they're gonna fight," says Affleck, here "you have two people who really truly believe they are doing something heroic and necessary in their conflict." And two rights make a right ding-dong.

IN THE END, THE ARGUMENT

goes like this: Superman thinks Batman's methods make him as much a criminal as the menagerie of pantomime freaks he's got locked up in Arkham Asylum (cue: *Suicide Squad*). "He doesn't agree with his form of justice," states Cavill, taking up the cause. "For this farm boy who tries to do things the right way, justice at any cost is not something he can come to terms with."

He doesn't want to bully Gotham's gothic antihero — that would make him as bad as Batman. He's supposed to be this figurehead for good, an untouchable. So at first, as Clark, he'll try and expose him in the papers, "show the world what this Batman dude is doing," says Cavill.

Problem is, Batman has no such qualms. Batman is willing to fight dirty. "Batman has seen the devastation that comes from aliens battling on Earth," reasons Affleck. "He thinks Superman's attracting flies to our planet. He is basically a beacon." Batman has counted the cost of Superman's so-called heroics. His view is simple: he's destroyed a city, he's murdered people, he must be stopped.

The monstrous Doomsday: will he function as superhero therapy?

"It's the human outlook on Superman," says Cavill, "and that is why such a major thing happens." And no matter how many Bat-toys a billionaire industrialist can buy, this isn't a fair fight, right?

"It's not about one on one," says Cavill, who points out that, if it was, then "of course Superman is going to win. But it's deeper than that. It's more that these two great powers exist and are actually trying to achieve the same thing, but in such different ways..." They are going to learn that the Super-hard way.

THE WORLD MAY HAVE

changed and the challenges intensified, but it's clear that whoever else is going to get suited and rebooted for DC's expansion, Superman is still very much the same guy we saw in *Man Of Steel*: he is Henry Cavill. As much as Zack Snyder, he provides crucial continuity from that movie — there is a good reason they didn't recast the role entirely and start from scratch. The part has become his entirely, and that's as much down to his focus and commitment as his physique.

THE DOOMSDAY SCENARIO

REVEALING *BATMAN V SUPERMAN'S* REAL SUPERBAD...

"TO GO UP AGAINST HEROES LIKE BATMAN AND Superman," says Zack Snyder, "we wanted to introduce one of the DC universe's most iconic and powerful villains." By act three of his comic-book epic he would require a baddie so powerful he would force the squabbling superheroes to set aside their ethical differences and unite against him, establishing The Justice League in the process. "He is essentially an unstoppable force," adds Snyder. "He poses a real threat to the world within the film."

By comic-book lore, Doomsday was born in the fiery depths of prehistoric Krypton like a sort of DC Balrog. Traditionally, the Hulk-sized monstrosity possesses enormous strength, agility, highly accelerated healing (in some renditions he actively resurrects) and an extremely bad temper (hate is all he knows). He even dispatched the Man Of Steel in the 1992 series *The Death Of Superman*. Quite how Snyder and his team will adapt such a demonic force to their real-world ethos remains under wraps. But he does fire a devastating heat-ray from his eyes...

Could it be that the presence of Doomsday is the net result of Lex Luthor's meddling, utilising Zod's corpse, Kryptonite and some arcane knowledge gained from Zod's Kryptonian ship?

"With Lex, anything is possible," replies Snyder cryptically, "but you'll have to wait and see..."

Since Christopher Reeve's sky-blue champion, a lasting Superman had eluded Hollywood. Brandon Routh and Bryan Singer did a credible version, but the idea of a quasi-sequel to Richard Donner's *Superman II* didn't compute (*Superman Returns* is arguably the most forgotten superhero movie of recent times). Tim Burton's ambitious reimagination of the interplanetary boy scout with *Superman Lives* foundered in a miasma of studio indecision. Then, in 2001, Wolfgang Petersen was actually developing *World's Finest: Batman Vs. Superman*, with Jude Law, Josh Hartnett or Matt Damon due to be the noble side of a contretemps kicked off by the murder of Bruce Wayne's wife. But that was pre-Marvel, when battling superheroes felt excessive.

Now the timing is right for this showdown, and Cavill remains the best (Super)man for the job. Even between takes. On set, *Empire* is told that whenever he and Snyder disagree over matters of Superman's psychology, they do push-ups until one gives in. "I don't do push-ups," snorts Cavill, who prefers three hours a day in the on-site gym to maintain his Super-physique. "Zack does lots of push-ups on set, though. He's started a push-up cult."

It's a sign of the times that even the director resembles a superhero, but for Cavill staying in shape is a point of professional necessity. Working out, he says, has become a lifestyle choice. He's put on 30 lbs of muscle for this movie, and will calm it down to 10 lbs between films. To play Superman every two years he maintains a base level of extremely fit before ramping it up to ridiculously cut, edging closer to DC's Olympian ideal first set down by school friends Jerry Siegel and artist Joe Shuster in 1933.

"It's not as if I am going to be able to play a POW and then Superman again," says Cavill. "My commitment lies with this first." You can't blame the man for his dedication: the 32 year-old British actor had been up for Batman, Bond and *Superman Returns* only to narrowly miss out on all of them. Finally, he got to help reinvent the Man Of Tomorrow for today, both awesome and troubled, and he wants to make sure the credibility never slips.

"He's always in there," he says, pointing to his titanic chest. Out there in the real real world, fans want to meet Superman not Henry Cavill, and that requires a certain bearing in every quarter. "It sits there simmering at ten per cent all the time," he says, "and then when it comes to acting you just crank it up to 100 per cent."

Very much in the public eye now himself, Superman does get to be a bit more, well, Superman this time around. He's no longer in the shadows. Quite the opposite. "There are hero moments where it looks like a hero moment," Cavill says proudly. "It doesn't look like a bum saving a bunch of people then disappearing into the shadows. We're introducing a potential long-term villain (Lex Luthor), we're introducing Batman, and we're introducing Wonder Woman. This is the *Dawn Of Justice*."

As he says, this isn't so much the 'second' Superman movie as the 'first' in a new series that will see him teamed up with Gal Gadot's Wonder Woman, Jason Momoa's Aquaman and Affleck's Batman. Although, it seems, the Justice League is still a high-high concept Cavill can't entirely get his head around. "It's a bunch of people who are all used to getting their own way, so we'll see how they interact," he smiles. "And the guy who can kick anyone's ass is the *nice* one." Well, depending on your point of view.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE SUPERMAN INSIGNIA

ILLUSTRATIONS **POP CHART LAB**



1940
***Superman* cartoons**



1948
***Superman* Columbia serials**



1952
***The Adventures Of Superman* TV series**



1978
Superman: The Movie



1993
***Lois & Clark: The New Adventures Of Superman* TV series**



1996
Superman: The Animated Series



2001
***Smallville* TV series**



2006
Superman Returns



2013
Man Of Steel



2016
Batman V Superman: Dawn Of Justice

BATMAN OR SUPERMAN?

EMPIRE ASKED HOLLYWOOD TO PICK SIDES...

"I was always more of a Batman person. He was more mysterious to me than Superman. Superman's kinda (*heroic voice*), "Here I am!" and Batman's more (*covers upper face with his hand and growls*), "I don't want to talk to anybody," so you're left wondering, 'What's that guy like?' But I'm waiting for that movie! It's gonna be a fun movie!"
Bryan Cranston

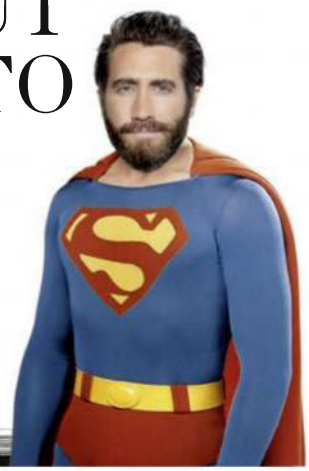
"Batman. I like things darker."
Jason Statham

"I did like Batman from the old television series. (*Sings*) 'Baaaatman! Dada-dada-dada-dada…' Adam West was the honorary mayor of the Palisades one July Fourth and he waved to me from his car as the parade went by. I waved back, of course."
Anthony Hopkins

"They're the same character. They're both nerds."
Ian McKellen

"Man, that's like Pacquiao versus Mayweather. Superman's cool, but I like Batman. The movies are better. I would have played Jimmy Olsen in Tim Burton's *Superman*. And J.Lo was Lois Lane. What could have been…"
Chris Rock

"I WOULDN'T MESS WITH EITHER OF THEM, BUT IF I HAD TO CHOOSE I'D GO KAL-EL."
Jake Gyllenhaal



"I'm surprised you even asked. I can't go back to my old neighbourhood if I don't say Batman!"
Matt Damon

"Oh God, that's so hard. But I'll say Superman, because I remember the weekend before I did my final screen-test for *Thor*, the sides were so remote — set in a fantastical realm with quite heightened dialogue — that I decided I'd go back to the source. I rented *Superman* and *Terminator 2* and watched them to gauge how you do that kind of material. Christopher Reeve, in my mind, is the first superhero. But I still think Batman is awesome, for public record."
Tom Hiddleston

"SUPERMAN, BECAUSE HIS WORLD WAS JUST SO MUCH COOLER. OUR HOUSE WAS A SUPERMAN HOUSE. ACTUALLY, SUPERGIRL I LIKED MORE. I WATCHED *SUPERGIRL* MORE THAN ANYTHING." **Amy Schumer**



"Supergirl."

Will Ferrell

"You're asking a girl. All girls love Batman. They love Batman. You ask any woman, 'Batman or Superman?' It's always going to be Batman. It's the mask, it's the muscles, it's the car. Come on, it's the Batmobile. The Batcave! Batman, man. Batman is *hot*. Superman needs a car. And the tights don't work for me."
Viola Davis

"Obviously I played Bane, so I can't really root for Batman, can I? And Superman is a man in spandex, it's ridiculous, so I don't really give a monkey's. I don't care who wins. When's Bane coming back, so I can slap the pair of 'em?"
Tom Hardy

"It really has to be Superman. The humbleness of Clark Kent. Batman I always found a little bit tedious. I'm also not sure about this whole Dark Knight thing. It's like what happened with James Bond — I liked it when James Bond was jokey. These Christopher Nolan films, no disrespect but they're about as witty as a black hole. Give me Adam West any day, or even the Burton ones. I love that. It's entertainment, for Christ's sake. It's not science. Superman's always fun, because essentially it's preposterous. Whereas Batman is more plausible. And these days, Batman and Robin is a lot more plausible… if you know what I mean!"
Brian Cox (the actor)

"Err, Batman. Why? The clothes: I don't like that blue thing with the 'S' on it."

Ralph Fiennes

"BATMAN. BECAUSE SUPERMAN CAN GO F**K HIMSELF."

Jennifer Lawrence



"Batman. I feel like he and I would listen to the same music."

Kristen Wiig

"Batman all the way. I've worked with both, ex-Batman and current Superman, and I know they're making it a bit darker, but Batman is a bit more human. And also Batman has the coolest cars."
Freida Pinto

"If you force me to choose, it's Batman, and not because we were adversaries. I'd like to pick both Batman *and* Superman. I would like to pick all superheroes, because I really do like them."
Arnold Schwarzenegger

"I'm probably a Batman guy. I still don't understand why people don't recognise Superman with his glasses off. I just feel like that's a giant logic hole. I didn't really enjoy the last Superman. They sort of kill everyone in a city and don't acknowledge it happened. Where's the clean-up section? I want to see guys with brooms."
Judd Apatow

"Batman, and not just because of the Adam West *Family Guy* connection. Because… Batman."

Seth MacFarlane

"That's a tough call. *Batman* is a very dark fantasy and *Superman* — the very first *Superman* that was done by a gentleman who directed one of my favourite movies, *The Omen*, Richard Donner — had an innocence to it that was refreshing. Therefore in a funny kind of way that was one of the best, most seriously intended versions. But if I had to pick one? Batman."
Ridley Scott

"Superman will always be my favourite comic-book character. I've had a special relationship with that character, but I'm intrigued by the notion of a powerful human character, being concerned at what happens if something goes awry. Should one man have so much power as Superman does? That's my longwinded answer to the question. The short answer is Superman." **Bryan Singer**

"BATMAN. SUPERMAN IS LIKE, 'TRUTH, JUSTICE AND THE AMERICAN WAY.' AND BATMAN IS LIKE, 'LIES, JUSTICE, MY WAY.' HE'S MORE BADASS." James McAvoy



BATMAN V SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE **IS OUT ON MARCH 25 AND WILL BE REVIEWED IN A FUTURE ISSUE.**



Ben Wheatley, photographed exclusively for *Empire* in Shoreditch, London, on December 18, 2015.

• ILLUSTRATION: JUSTIN METZ. GROOMING: JOANNE COLEMAN



MAN ON THE EDGE

Ben Wheatley returns with his toughest, most ambitious movie yet, and one that required him to do what few other filmmakers have attempted: adapt J. G. Ballard...

WORDS **CHRIS HEWITT** PORTRAIT **MATT HOLYOAK**



JEREMY THOMAS WAS IN SOMETHING of a quandary. For more than ten years, the Oscar-winning producer of *The Last Emperor*, *Naked Lunch* and *Sexy Beast* had been trying to adapt J. G. Ballard's 1975 novel *High-Rise* for the big screen. He'd already produced one Ballard movie, David Cronenberg's 1996 adaptation of *Crash*, to great acclaim (and the disgust of Westminster Council) and had become friends with Ballard in the process.

But *High-Rise* was a tougher nut to crack. A dystopian tale of the mania that strikes inhabitants of a brand-new tower block in 1970s London, Ballard's novel details violence and debauchery with his usual detached precision. Though it felt cinematic, directors had come, directors had gone. Screenplays had been written and discarded. Every year, Thomas dutifully renewed the rights, even after Ballard passed away in 2009, and kept at it. But it wasn't looking good. "I've been a decade on this one," he says. "But I didn't get it right the first few years."

To get it right, he needed a miracle. He needed the hottest director in Britain right now to take a glance at his bookshelf, see *High-Rise* sitting there, and fancy taking a shot at it. But what were the odds of that?

Quite good, as it turns out. "I was at home and just saw it on the shelf," says Ben Wheatley. "I thought, 'I want to make that. Why hasn't it been done?' At that point it was the first time we could think about licensing books. It was always original stuff before that because we couldn't afford it."

Wheatley may be selling himself short there. Virtually unheard of before his blistering and ultra-low-budget debut, *Down Terrace*, in 2009, the Brighton-based filmmaker has established himself as one of the most vital and fresh voices in British filmmaking. Not to mention prolific. Since *Down Terrace*, Wheatley's original material has consisted of the gut-wrenching horror *Kill List*, dark comedy *Sightseers* and the black-and-white delirium of *A Field In England*. He didn't release a movie last year, but he did direct the first two episodes of Peter Capaldi's run on *Doctor Who*. "Strictly speaking, that's a film," he laughs. "It got a theatrical release. It made more money than anything I've done!"

Wheatley, who first encountered Ballard's novel when he was a teenager, took his copy from his shelf and re-read it to confirm his suspicions. First, that although it was set during the '70s, it remained as timely a vision of Britain's bleak future as ever, with the rich turning on each other, the poor being consumed in the crossfire, and society crumbling. "We're in a permanent '70s," says Wheatley. "I think that period for the UK was a massive turning point. I was interested in it historically."

And second, that making it was going to be bloody tricky. "I was struck by how visual it was, and terrified by how difficult it was narratively." Asking around to see who held the rights, he quickly sat down with Thomas, and just as quickly came on board to try to succeed where so many other directors had failed.

"When I met Ben, he explained to me he wanted to write something different from the scripts I already had," says Jeremy Thomas. "He wanted to go back to the book: pure. Which is what I should have done myself. That was the right idea, and gave the film a personality and a flavour that is quite fascinating."

If adapting Ballard were easy, everyone would be doing it. The author wrote 19 novels (not to mention dozens of short stories) across five decades, and only a handful have been turned into movies — most notably Steven Spielberg's *Empire Of The Sun* (an altogether atypical Ballard, based on his childhood experiences in an internment camp in Shanghai) and Cronenberg's *Crash*. Unadapted titles include *The Burning World*, *Cocaine Nights* and *Concrete Island*, all rich in high concepts, challenging ideas, startling explorations of the tensions that lurk beneath our civilised veneers, and precise prose that seems to resist being redrawn for the big screen. Wheatley, though, had an ace up his sleeve: his wife. Amy Jump is as much responsible for Wheatley's films

Clockwise from above: A laidback Tom Hiddleston on set with Ben Wheatley and crew; Sienna Guillory as Jane Sheridan; Hiddleston (Robert Laing), Wheatley, Luke Evans (Richard Wilder) and James Purefoy (Pangbourne) looking all manly; Concept art and storyboards for the film.







as her husband, as editor and writer on every one of his films since *Kill List*, and writer on *High-Rise*.

"I get the script when it's done," says Wheatley. "I don't stand around behind her, making suggestions. Well, I do, but then I'm told strongly to go away. We don't discuss the script — we've been making stuff since we were 16. Amy is a better writer than I am. I want what's in her head, not something that's been complicated by me."

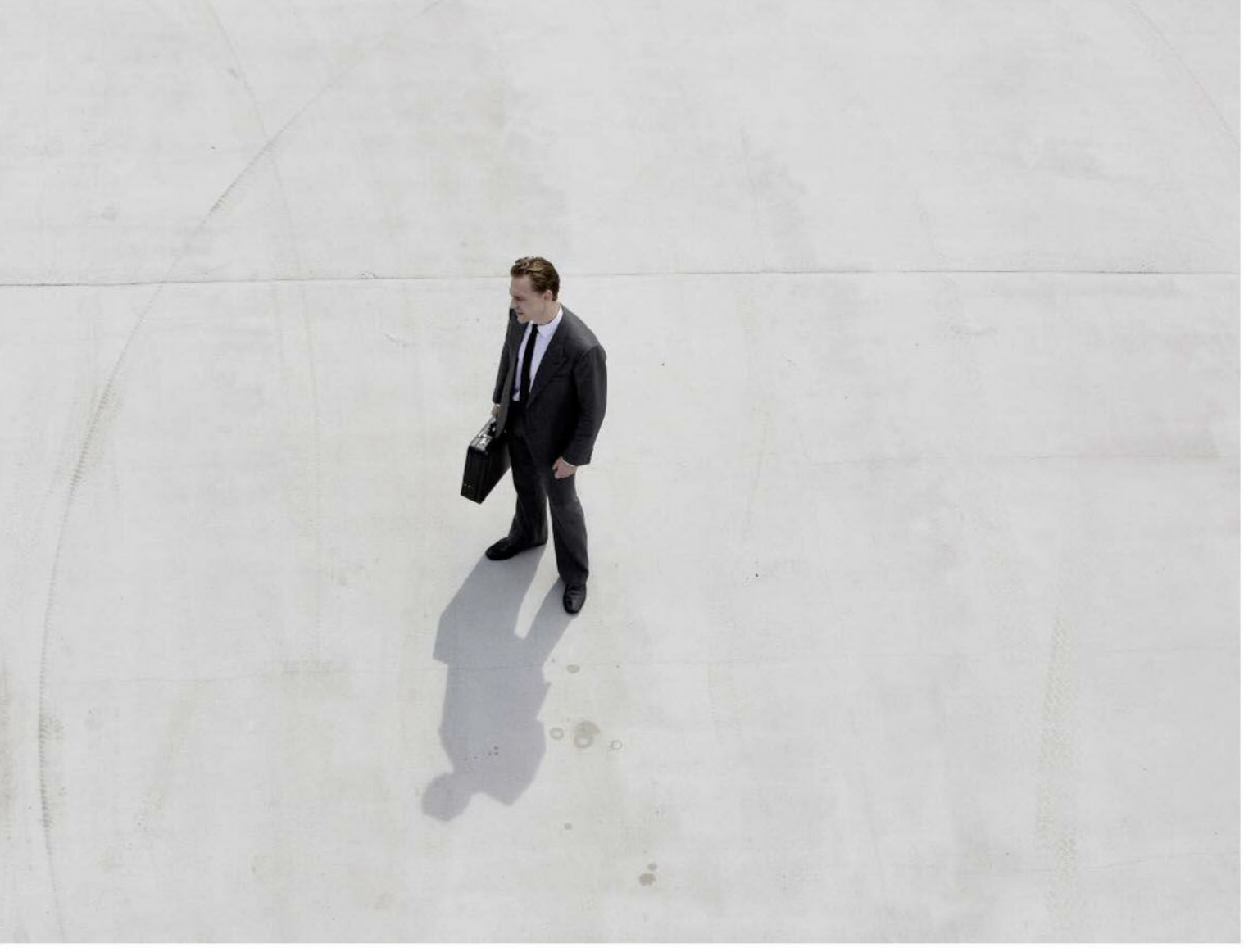
Although he wasn't involved in the screenwriting, Wheatley is keenly aware of where the writing could have gone wrong. "The issue with the book is that there's not much dialogue, there's a lot of reported speech and a lot of the stuff that's enjoyable is description. That's hard to translate to the more literal world of film."

And then there's the most difficult obstacle of them all to surmount: the Ballardian hero. This curious figure looms in most of Ballard's books: detached, withdrawn, largely content to passively watch events unfold. In *High-Rise*, that protagonist is Robert Laing, an urbane doctor who reacts with bemusement to the increasing insanity in the tower block . "He's the classically difficult fucking Ballardian













character in that he doesn't want to get involved in anything," says Wheatley. It's counterintuitive to modern film structure. What do you do with the guy who won't get involved and is, basically, the hero?"

Simple. You cast Tom Hiddleston.

It's an unlikely scenario, granted, but if Hiddleston had popped round to the Wheatley/Jump household for a cup of sugar during the *High-Rise* development phase, he'd have seen his own face looking back at him from the fridge. Wheatley and Jump had him in mind for Laing from the off, and in fact he was the first actor cast.

Hiddleston is the biggest name to show up in a Wheatley film yet, giving *High-Rise* the kind of profile not enjoyed by the director's previous movies. And Loki does not equal low-key. On the film's set, a disused leisure centre in the seaside town of Bangor, Northern Ireland, Hiddlestoners gathered outside the gates every day for a glimpse of their hero (and a bemused Wheatley, who *Empire* saw signing autographs with a baffled grin). Social media mentions of the film went into overdrive. A Twitter user named Lego_Loki undertook a project to recreate every page of the book in LEGO (see right). "That's the radiation of star power," says Wheatley, "feeding a bit of Marvel over to Northern Ireland. You hope you can translate that into bums on seats in the cinema."

But Hiddleston was also the perfect choice for Laing: tall, handsome, hidden depths lurking beneath a benign surface. It also helped that he was already a Ballard fan, courtesy of exposure to the author via a roommate at Cambridge University. When *Empire* visits his trailer, on a warm August day in 2014, he allows a peek at his script, festooned with annotations and quotes from Ballard, remnants of his research, and insights into his character. "These are my half-mad ramblings," he grins, before launching into a potted history of Ballard that covers his "rebellious and so provocative" writing, his "very English" charm, his fascination with "the machinery of the human body, which feeds the metaphor of the high-rise as the ultimate mechanical body that is going wrong", and about half-a-dozen quotes from both the book and further writings. It's clear Hiddleston knows his Ballardian onions. It's also easy to see how he got a double first in Classics. Wheatley would find himself engaged in email exchanges with Hiddleston about the minutiae of all things Ballard. "He's very clever," says Wheatley. "Shockingly clever."

Hiddleston first heard of the project from producer Jeremy Thomas when they worked together on *Only Lovers Left Alive*. He even read another *High-Rise* adaptation, by a writer who shall remain nameless. "It was more like *Die Hard*, and I wasn't drawn to it for that reason," he says. "It didn't work. Although Ben and I did talk about *Die Hard* a lot, interestingly."

If John McClane had dealt with his own high-rise troubles in the same manner as Laing, Hans Gruber would be a very rich man. Laing's passivity presented a challenge for Hiddleston. Not that he doesn't get to rant, rave, curse, fuck and carouse in the role, but where, say, Luke Evans' Wilder is a proactive force of nature in the film, Laing prefers to remain on the sidelines, watching. Waiting.

"The intellectual detachment is very Ballardian," says Hiddleston. "He reads the terrain and understands that his only way out is to be passive. It was hard to square. There's a reading of it that says he's some sort of moral coward, but I think Ballard is suggesting something more unsettling: a feral nature."

Clockwise from above: Hiddleston as Dr. Robert Laing; Sienna Miller and Luke Evans as Charlotte Melville and Richard Wilder; Hiddleston with Elizabeth Moss's Helen Wilder.





That feral nature — not just Laing's, but of everyone caught in the towering inferno — is in evidence on set, as *Empire* witnesses in a key scene where Laing and most of the major characters converge on the building's supermarket for a tumultuous trolley dash. While others tool up (in a wonderful touch, Peter Ferdinando's newsreader, Cosgrove, brandishes a BAFTA; Wheatley had to get special permission to use it) and head straight for vital supplies, Laing instead makes a beeline for a can of grey paint — all the better to finish an impromptu redecorating job on his apartment.

Tension is in the air, punches are thrown, the immortal phrase, "BAFTA HIM!" is yelled, and one character gets knocked out by a flying tin of baked beans.

It's chaotic, but Wheatley and his DP, Laurie Rose, weave through the mayhem with aplomb, intertwining black comedy and blacker violence. The finished scene is as challenging, polarising, funny, bleak and politically charged as its source material. And it fits right in with Wheatley's worldview. *High-Rise* is Ballardian, all right, but it's also deeply, unforgettably Wheatleyesque. As Thomas puts it, "Ben wouldn't hold back." Though, in making it, he did push himself into new territory.

For a man whose last film was shot across two weeks in, well, a field in England, *High-Rise* represents a watershed for Wheatley. He was working with movie stars for the first time, and the seven-week shooting schedule would have covered two *Sightseers*, three *Kill Lists* or six *Down Terraces*. "It was the movie we could afford to have camera movement for, for the first time," he says. "It was a totally different way of working. It was moving outside a comfort zone I had."

Wheatley doesn't intend to stop moving in that direction. With *High-Rise* in the can, he has already made another film — the gritty action thriller *Free Fire*, in which a group of criminals (including Armie Hammer, Brie Larson and Sharlto Copley, alongside Wheatley regular Michael Smiley) take potshots at each other inside a Boston warehouse.

And he's hard at work lining up his next. He's still plugging away on monsters-versus-cops movie *Freak Shift*. He wants to make a film about the Battle Of Britain. And he fancies a romcom. "I want to do something that has a bit of joy in it, but I'm not sure how," says Wheatley in his deadpan, hard-to-decipher manner. "I need to address the balance of violence and do something more cheery."

Intriguingly, he says his next movie could be a remake of Henri-Georges Clouzot's classic thriller *The Wages Of Fear*, in which four truckers transport volatile nitro-glycerine through a mountain range in the knowledge they could go boom at any time. It's been remade once before, as *Sorcerer* by William Friedkin, but it feels perfectly suited to Wheatley's talents.

"It's kind of bonkers to do it again, but a good bonkers," he says. "We're going back to old-school tension. The main change for me is that it will be set in Africa, and it'll have women in it! Women truckers. They're built around two or three amazing set-pieces, these movies, and that's the challenge. It's physics-based filmmaking, and something you've not seen before."

If nothing else, the fact he's even considering re-remaking a stone-cold classic reveals Wheatley's burgeoning confidence — now that he's adapted Ballard, he's ready for anything.

HIGH-RISE IS OUT ON MARCH 18 AND WILL BE REVIEWED IN THE NEXT ISSUE.

BRICKING IT

AFTER ACCEPTING A CHALLENGE FROM @HIGHRISE_MOVIE ON TWITTER, HIDDLESTONER @LOKI_LEGO SET ABOUT CREATING HIS OWN ADAPTATION...



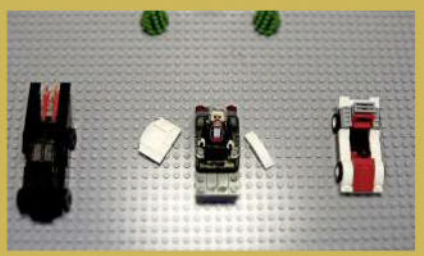
"Later, as he sat on his balcony eating the dog..." I had to include the first line of the book. I suspect I'm one of the only people ever to create a LEGO dog barbecue.



I got a lot of requests to recreate the scene of Laing sunbathing nude. I had to finish it in Photoshop — LEGO has never made a minifigure with a naked bottom half.



I took 1,188 photos for *Brick High-Rise*, and whittled them down to 166. Scattering urine-coloured studs into the pool remains one of my favourite memories.



Of the 180 hours that it took me to complete photography, I estimate that I spent around ten hours washing fake blood off LEGO.



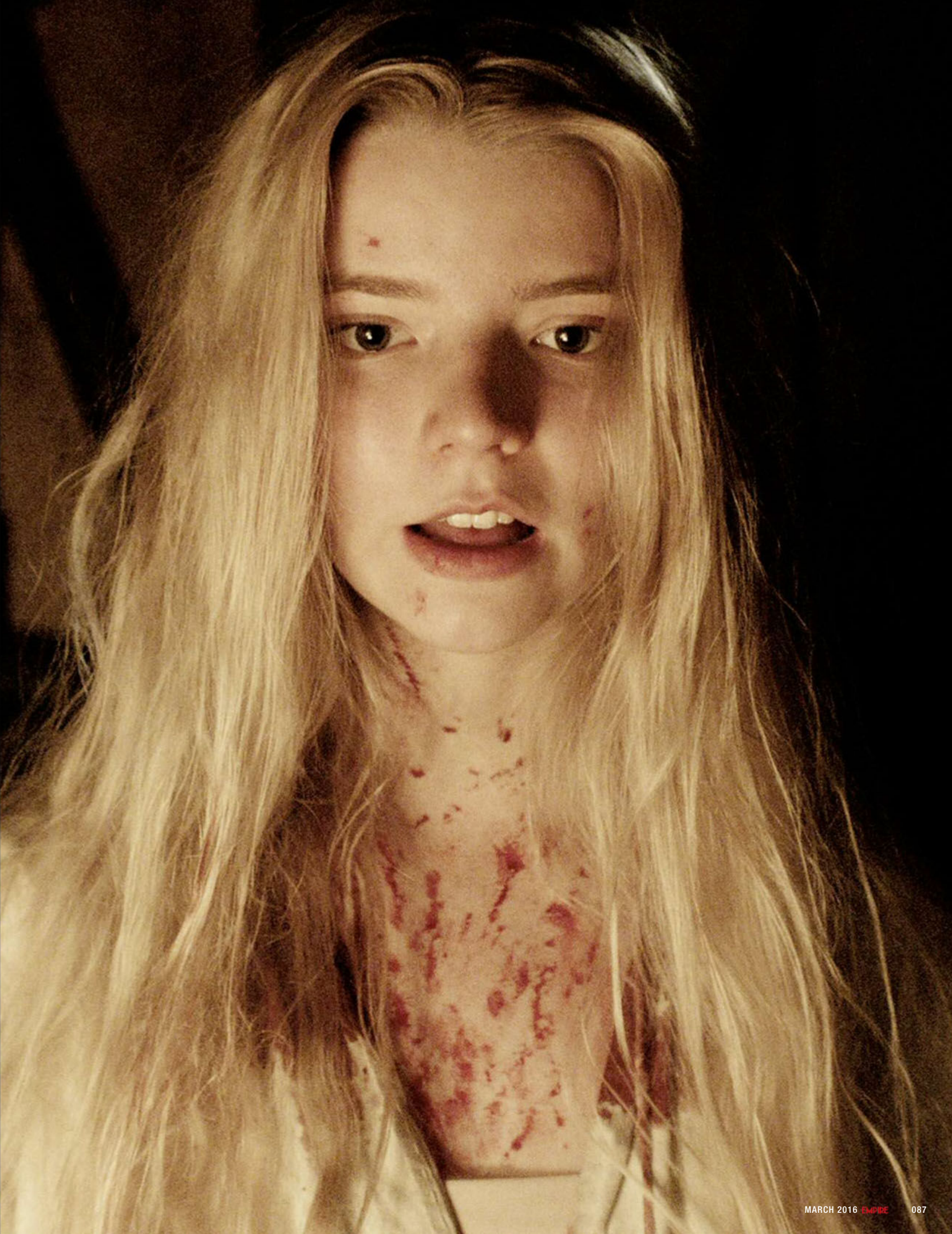
In order to create the scenes of the high-rise descending into chaos, I had to place several large LEGO orders. The final budget for *Brick High-Rise* was £192.56.

CHECK OUT THE ENTIRE PROJECT AT WWW.BRICKHIGHRISE.CO.UK



HOW FIRST-TIME DIRECTOR ROBERT EGGERS TURNED A CHILDHOOD OBSESSION INTO WHAT COULD BE THE YEAR'S MOST TERRIFYING MOVIE

WORDS **SIMON CROOK** TYPE **JETHRO HAYNES**





God-fearing William (Ralph Ineson) and Katherine (Kate Dickie) look to the heavens, for all the good it'll do them.

"All of my first nightmares were about witches..." It's the week before Hallowe'en, and *Empire* is in the company of Robert Eggers, whose directorial debut, *The Witch*, is one of the most unnerving, distinctive American horrors since the century's turn. He is determined, it seems, to make his earliest nightmares our newest ones.

Set in colonial New England circa 1630, *The Witch* follows a Puritan family into self-imposed exile on the edge of an imposing forest. When their newborn mysteriously vanishes from the farm, suspicions turn towards teenage daughter Thomasin (Anya Taylor-Joy). Is witchcraft at work? Or is something else feeding the family's paranoia?

It's been hailed as *The Crucible* meets *The Shining*, but even that doesn't do the film justice. *The Witch* is founded on modern-horror tropes — log cabin, family in peril, an entity in the woods — but what makes it unique and so uncanny is Eggers' meticulous evocation of the Puritan period that, says Kate Dickie (who plays Thomasin's mother), makes you "feel like you've stepped into another world". *The Witch* and its creator seem to have come out of nowhere, so the question is, what world did Eggers step out of?

WITCHES WERE IMPOSSIBLE

to escape where Eggers grew up. Settled in 1657, Lee, New Hampshire, is haunted by its past. Scattered around the forests of the rural backwater are decrepit colonial houses and graveyards, known locally as "open museums". As children, Eggers and his friends would lap up stories of witches in the woods and weave their own folklore around them. "Witches were part of my imaginary playground," he says. Sixty miles south lies Salem, site of the infamous witch trials, where the young Eggers and his occult-obsessed buddies would travel every Hallowe'en, though he was "disappointed the witches weren't real".

Dressed in black and immaculately bearded, there's a hint of out-of-time Edwardian to Eggers. All his favourite directors are, he says, "dead guys", and he has "a medieval knight movie, set in a mythic past with angels and demons", planned as his next film. He is talkative, cerebral and quick to laugh at himself, but







behind the mild-mannered disposition lies a deeply macabre imagination.

The son of a Shakespeare scholar, he developed a taste for directing at the now-defunct Edwin Booth Theatre in nearby Dover. Most notably, he was behind a 2001 stage revival of F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (Eggers has unfinished business with the vampire — a remake with *Witch* producers Jan Van Hoy and Lars Knudsen was announced in July 2015). Then, having moved to Brooklyn, he established himself as an in-demand production designer. When Eggers says he's "been through the meat-grinder", he's not kidding. His set-dressing CV ranges from *Esquire* magazine to *Sesame Street*, and includes a creature-making gig for comedian Victor Varnado (Google "*Roboto Supremo*" and check out his fearsome lobster-clawed pigzilla).

Eggers' witchy fixation first surfaced in 2007 with *Hansel And Gretel*, a short that restyled the tale as woozy, spooky expressionist gothic. A year later, he made *The Tell-Tale Heart*, based on the Edgar Allan Poe chiller. Shot in candlelight, ornately detailed and deeply eerie, it's tempting to see it now as a stylistic prototype; a throat-clearing before Eggers found his voice with *The Witch*.

After writing "weird, genre-less" scripts ("One was *much* more disturbing than *The Witch*"), Eggers hit on an idea that combined his two obsessions: fairy tales and New Hampshire's ominous past.

"*The Witch* started as a feeling rather than a story, a fear channelled from the past," he says. "I wanted it to feel like a Puritan's nightmare, uploaded into the mind's eye of a 21st-century audience. And I didn't make anything up. All the weird shit in the movie was based on research."

Taylor-Joy calls Eggers a "walking, talking encyclopaedia", and no wonder. From the ages of 26 to 30, he fed his core *Witch* concept with what he describes as "wild, almost disgusting" research, given it was so darkly gratifying. He meticulously consumed prayer manuals, folk tales and witchcraft trials, including one in which he says an Elizabethan witch was accused of giving a child poisoned apples — "years before *Snow White* was published". He would note down anything "bizarre and exotic", lifting phrases from contemporary reports and shaping his dialogue around them. What he discovered via all these arcane, ancient texts was that in the 1600s, "the fairy-tale world and the real world were seen as the same thing". This is the essence of *The Witch*, where the natural and the supernatural are impossible to separate. Five years of research is a manic indulgence, but the immersion had a purpose. As his editor Louise Ford points out: "How can you transport an audience to another world if you can't even transport yourself?"

Top: Writer-director Robert Eggers schools Harvey Scrimshaw (who plays eldest son Caleb) in self-defence. **Above:** Thomasin (Anya Taylor-Joy) with a somewhat friendlier goat than Black Phillip.

AS THE SCRIPT DEVELOPED, during this process, the first draft taking him almost a year of the five to complete, occult imagery from artists such as Hans Baldung, Salvator Rosa and Francisco de Goya shaped *The Witch*'s fantastical visuals. "For me, fairy tales — not Victorian, Disneyised fairy tales — are genuine enigmas. They seem to tap into a primal threat we've been disconnected from. The art was a huge influence. When you look at, say, Hans Baldung's woodcuts you think, 'Wow, that's *creepy*,' then you look closer and, 'Are those *foetus skulls* in there...?'" What Baldung captured — and Eggers reclaims — is a sense of the witch as a malignant, primitive, unearthly force. He makes witches *fucking frightening* again.

When he sent out the script, it was accompanied by a lookbook. Yet what sets the concept apart from other horror movies or twists on fairy-tales proved off-putting to some potential investors. "People thought, 'Okay, this guy might make a scary witch movie,'" says Eggers, "'but I don't want to pay for authenticity. Nobody's going to pay to see a Pilgrim movie where they're speaking in Jacobean English.' It took a long time to find investors who saw the movie the same way I did." However, he feels these setbacks were to the film's benefit. "If I'd got the money right away, it'd be a different movie. I worked on more film sets, and had *lots* more time to research." Eggers lets out a sort of mildly deranged laugh.

The extra time also allowed him to settle on his ideal cast, beginning with Ralph Ineson, who who plays Puritan patriarch William. "Weirdly, it was Ralph's voice that was in my head as I was writing," explains Eggers. So struck was he by Ineson that he rewrote the family to

fit around the actor's Yorkshire burr (his Puritans were initially from Essex, innit).

When Ineson asked Eggers, "Where did you find me?" the answer was *The Office*, and the character of Finchy. "I was surprised too," says Ineson. "But thinking about it, there's a similarity between William and Finchy: that huge, dark front that they work behind, the enormous ego."

You expect a production designer to have a good eye, but Eggers clearly also has a knack for casting, discovering Anya Taylor-Joy in an extraordinary breakout role as Thomasin. Taylor-Joy's was the first audition tape Eggers watched, and he thought she was too good to be true. He then saw "a thousand more" tapes, just to be a thousand times sure. "There's so much mystery to Thomasin," he says. "I could stick the camera two inches from Anya's nose and still be thinking, 'What's going on there?'"

EGGERS' QUEST TO RECREATE the past as faithfully as possible originally drove him towards a New Hampshire shoot, but the lack of tax breaks proved prohibitive. So during the winter of 2013, Eggers trekked through the Ontario wilderness, searching for a white-pine and hemlock forest that looked like New England. After two months he found it in Kiosk, an abandoned lumber town on the edge of the vast Algonquin Provincial Park. "It was five hours north of Toronto," says Eggers, "and so remote, there were only 60 people living in the region."

Isolated from civilisation, *The Witch* began its 25-day outdoor shoot. Bunkered in Le Voyageur Inn, a dinky blue-roofed chalet in Mattawa, the cast instantly clicked during rehearsals. They had to. Much like their fictional family, they were stranded in union. "From the first day, because the material was so dark and so obsessive, we were clinging to each other for support," says Dickie. Each day, Ineson drove his 'family' to set down Highway 630: "I felt like dad doing the school run."

Eggers has blocked the first day of the shoot from his mind, it was so traumatic. "What I *do* remember," he says, "is the terror of realising what I'd gotten myself into. Aside from the cast, everything was a bit of a nightmare." If it was bad enough being at the mercy of the elements, Eggers invited further pain by challenging that showbiz adage: never work with animals and children. Ineson says Eggers did a "fantastic puppeteer's job" with his kids (who thought they were in a Disney film).

The trouble began when Charlie, the star goat who 'plays' Black Phillip, refused to 'play' at all. "Imagine a stoner goat," says Taylor-Joy. "Most of the time,

Hag Tracking

THE MANY FACES OF THE MOVIE WITCH



HÄXAN (1922)

This Swedish silent-era reconstruction of the witch-hunt era burns with hellish imagery: Boschian Sabbaths, a squadron of broomsticks, potions brewed from "pigeon's heart and cat-shit". It's the grand-witch of occult movies, banned for years, hugely influential and still delightfully horrible.



MARY POPPINS (1964)

Swap the broomstick for an umbrella, the cauldron for a magic handbag and Black Sabbath for a penguin tea-party. Okay, maybe not the last one, but Julie Andrews is a crone in nanny's clothing, a weirdly subversive mother figure who paved the way for the non-threatening suburban white-witchery of *Bewitched*, *Sabrina* et al.



SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS (1937)

Legendary animator Joe Grant based the Evil Queen's doppel-hagger on two sources: fairy-tale illustrator Arthur Rackham and Murnau's *Nosferatu* (it's all in the fingers). The design is so iconic she's entered the consciousness as *the* childhood-scarring hag.



ROSEMARY'S BABY (1968)

Anticipating the occult hysteria that gripped the '70s, here's the witch in everyday camouflage. The message carried by Ruth Gordon's ingratiating, Satan-spawning, tannis-brewing hag couldn't be more paranoid: even your next-door neighbour could be one! The first and only witch to win an Oscar.



THE WIZARD OF OZ (1939)

Think "witch" and bets are you're already picturing a pointy hat and spinach-green skin. Despite the musicals and origin stories, Margaret Hamilton's Wicked Witch Of The West remains undiluted as Oz's evil essence, a performance so alarming that most of Hamilton's scenes were deleted (including one where she turns the Tin Man into a beehive).



THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT (1999)

The minimalist genius of the Burkittsville Hag shows the witch myth at its most potent. From just noises (clacking stones) and witness descriptions (hairy arms and a cloak), her image exists purely in your own imagination. You never see her. Though, some argue, that's her holding the camera at the end. Brrr.



William faces peril in the woods. You're a long way from Slough now, Finchy.



A mysterious evil lurks as Caleb and Thomasin lock horns. But is it real or in their heads?



Katherine feels the strain of remote Puritan life.

he just wanted to lie in the sun and have a nice scratch." It was Ineson who got the butt-end of Charlie. One sequence, later changed, called for some hefty man-on-goat grappling. "I lost over 30lbs for the film, so I was at my absolute weediest, and had to wrestle a 14-and-a-half-stone goat," cringes Ineson. "I did 27 takes and, well, it didn't go quite right. I ended up in ER. He managed to detach a tendon from my rib." (As a trophy, Ineson was given a cast of Black Phillip's horns. They're now on display in his downstairs loo.)

It all sounds like an endurance test. Ineson chopping logs in a sub-zero chill... Dickie pecked by ravens for one especially disturbing scene... "Was it a sombre experience?" counters Taylor-Joy. "No way. It was tough and intense, but for us, the actors, it was a joy. It's all down to Rob. He's smart, singular and a total one-off, but he's a warm guy too. I mean, you should see the blooper reel. It's the funniest thing you've ever seen."

As the shoot neared May, the woollen costumes that had shielded the cast from the cold were now cooking them alive. Suddenly, they were racing against the sun, and the rise of the black fly. Everyone pitched in to hold back spring. "I have this beautiful photo of all of us, up in the trees," says Taylor-Joy, "picking buds off the branches so it still looked like winter..."

GIVEN THE BUDGET, OF ABOUT $3.5 million, Eggers crafted a miracle in Kiosk. The cabin, recreated from notes from the 1600s, was built from white-oak clapboards, fastened by hand-made trunnels. Interiors were lit by triple-wick candles. Even the Witch herself is 'real'. No CG. No prosthetics. Eggers turned 90 year-old Bathsheba Garnett into a hag "using dirt, blood and shadow. Bathsheba removed all her teeth and all her clothing, an incredibly exposing thing to do."

For inspiration, Eggers admits to "dissecting *The Shining* with a scalpel". Then, in the edit suite, the spirit of Ingmar Bergman loomed large. "A major influence was *The Virgin Spring*," says Ford.

Eggers describes Bergman as "a better horror director than most horror directors — because he confronts what's primal in human nature, instead of peeking round a corner at human darkness with a flashlight and running away laughing."

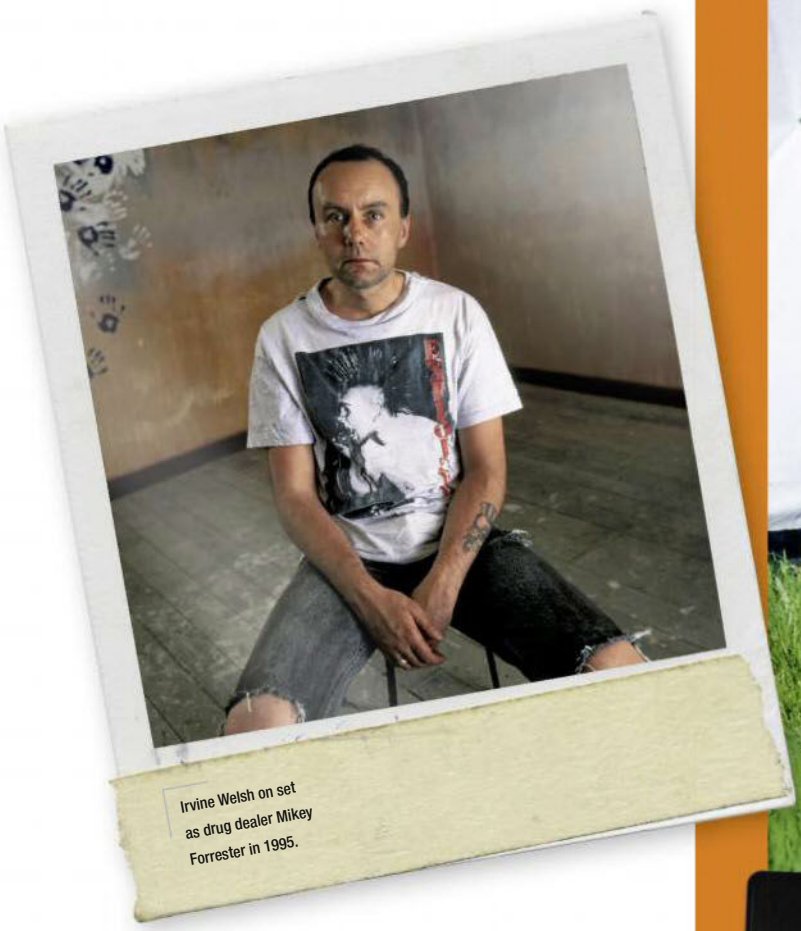
Maybe that's the key to *The Witch*'s impact — the evil it presents remains unnervingly ambiguous, Eggers leaving it wide open to interpretation. It'll be debated, you sense, for years to come.

THE WITCH IS OUT ON MARCH 11 AND WILL BE REVIEWED IN THE NEXT ISSUE.

Perfect Days

Twenty years since the film's release, Trainspotting creator Irvine Welsh relives the transformation of his debut novel into the most important British movie of the 1990s





Irvine Welsh on set as drug dealer Mikey Forrester in 1995.





You can't really lose when your novel is adapted for cinema.

If the subsequent film is a success, you can (justifiably) claim that the source material was a major factor in this. Failure, conversely, allows you to distance yourself from the movie, offering the hint that those bad filmmakers fucked it all up. It's unwise to do the latter overtly; film is a collaborative art form and if you've loudmouthed about your misgivings concerning the final offering, the chances are people won't be lining up around the block to work with you on future enterprises.

Thrusting a novelist — perhaps the ultimate individualist



Left: Danny Boyle, Jonny Lee Miller and Ewan McGregor on location for the "effete wankers" scene.
Below and overleaf: From the archives: production stills and on-set images featuring cast and crew.

— into a collective artistic endeavour seems a recipe for tension and discord. When such enmity occurs, it often stems from a misunderstanding of the process of adapting a book for screen, usually on the author's part. From my conversations with novelists, too many are curators of their own work rather than genuinely excited at the prospect of creative transformation into a different medium. As an author, it's crucial to immediately divest yourself of the notion that your book is being tampered with or changed in any way. The novel is still there, intact; the existence of a film adaptation won't change a word of it.

You can't repeat that win-win mantra to yourself enough: the real issue is the scale of your success. Obviously, you stand a better chance of winning bigger if the film is exceptional. And any collaboration is more likely to succeed if you get involved positively in assisting it to this end.

In film, paradoxically, one of the ways the author can do that is to simply keep the fuck out of the road. On set, the director has to be the person making the decisions. The author should only be there (or preferably not) under their grace, and operating within the confines of any defined role they've been designated, be it producer, consultant, actor, cheerleader or gofer. I've done all of them on various films. It's good manners to acknowledge that the filmmakers aren't looking over your shoulder as you're typing out the chapters of your novel, so afford them the same respect on set as they shoot their scenes.

Above all, acceptance of the difference of the mediums and acknowledgement of the inherent reciprocity is crucial. I often joke with Jon Baird, who adapted my novel *Filth* for cinema, that his movie is just a commercial for my book, while he describes my novel as the "overstuffed flier" for his film.

My recollections as to how *Trainspotting* came to the screen are a little hazy and unreliable, so please take them with a pinch of salt. What I'm sure about was that after writing the book (then a couple more) I moved to Amsterdam. I was enjoying my retirement from work in my mid-thirties, concentrating on my hobby of writing. Ensconced in a lovely flat overlooking a canal, I was essentially living the writer's dream, doing another book (my fourth) and a stage play.

Meanwhile, trips back to Edinburgh and London confirmed to me that the novel was basically going nuts. Word of mouth was generating excellent sales, while a highly successful stage show, devised by Harry Gibson and produced by Ian Brown for the Traverse Theatre, was touring and earning rave notices. Most importantly, I was besieged with enquiries for the film rights to *Trainspotting*.

I was determined that any movie would have to capture the relentless energy of the novel. First and foremost it needed to be, despite the often-grim subject matter, an uncompromisingly swaggering celebration of youthful camaraderie and *joie de vivre*. The last thing I wanted was a dreary docudrama about heroin, with its stock procession of victims. I didn't see the book as po-faced social realism, flagging up drugs as an issue in a futile attempt to guilt-trip uncaring policy makers, while only really underlining bourgeois smugness. I viewed drugs as neither an intrinsically *good* nor *bad* thing, but endemic to the development of late capitalism; a symptom of an economy transforming into a world without paid work, sustained by

a debt-fuelled, fag-end consumerism.

Trainspotting is essentially a story about the pains of that economic and social transition. I believe that even if acknowledgment of this sea change is not permitted at cultural level by elites and the media, people still intuitively get it. It's my conviction that this (often-subconscious) resonance accounts, at least in part, for the enduring popularity of the *Trainspotting* phenomenon.

But the correspondence I received from interested filmmakers tended to be *worthy*. Few seemed to get where I was coming from, except one producer, who was also offering (what was then for me) decent money. At this point things started to get messy, and this was largely my fault, as I didn't have an agent. (I had done very well negotiating my own book deals, so arrogantly presumed I could operate the same way in the more complex world of film. In that conceit I'd be proven wrong many times.) This producer mentioned several directors who would be a good fit for this. Top of his list was the acclaimed *Shallow Grave* helmsman Danny Boyle, leading me to make the assumption that he was Danny's regular producer. He wasn't. Confusion reigned when I subsequently received an enthusiastically hand-written note from Danny, mapping out his vision for *Trainspotting*, but also stridently emphasising that he, (*writer*) John Hodge and (*producer*) Andrew Macdonald were an indivisible combination. It was written as if somebody had mooted splitting up this sterling partnership, which was news to me. Yet, even if I was a misplaced recipient of this information, I recall admiring Danny's emphatic defence of the team. He also sent me a screener of *Shallow Grave*, urging me to watch it, which I instantly did.

I loved the movie and saw that its cinematic energy would be the ideal complement to my characters and the ubiquitous, resonant issue of illegal drugs. (With acid house, everybody was popping pills in fields and factories, but if you looked in the media or read current fiction, you'd never know this.) To my mind this combination stood the best chance of producing something memorable. The only problem was that I had already sold the rights. As the credits rolled up on *Shallow Grave*, I thought in grim exasperation: "*Bastard!*"

I quickly got in touch with the producer who now owned the rights, as did Andrew and Danny, both of whom are incredibly persuasive in different ways. One is laconic, offering smooth, cool logic, the other bursting with overt passion and enthusiasm. Thankfully the producer was amenable, generously conceding that the fit between novel and filmmakers was ideal. The rights were transferred to Andrew Macdonald's Figment Films and we were in business.

So began the process. I was sent regular scripts from John Hodge, which I read in my Amsterdam flat through a stoner haze, my notes usually consisting of "great stuff" or "don't change a word". Having started writing for film myself, I was hugely impressed by the way he'd managed to construct a cinematic narrative around a lose bunch of tales. I decided it was better to be supportive and not fuck with the energy, rather than nitpick on detail. Besides, I didn't believe that there was anything that myself or anybody else could teach John about screenwriting. I still feel the same way today.

One great way to keep a rogue novelist onside is to cast them in the movie. *That* will get them invested in the project. So when shooting began, I took my place as drug dealer Mikey Forrester. I think I asked Danny and John if Forrester could have a shagging scene — preferably a threesome — but they weren't having any of it.





Bizarrely, we were shooting *Trainspotting* in incredible heat. To everybody's astonishment, Glasgow was the hottest place in Europe on the days I did my scenes at our set in the old Wills tobacco factory, in the north of the city. I took it as an optimistic sign: this movie was going to sizzle! I had terrific confidence in the material and the performers that Danny and the casting directors had assembled. Everybody seemed really on it. Ewan McGregor, Bobby Carlyle, Jonny Lee Miller, Ewen Bremner, Kelly Macdonald, Kevin McKidd, Susan Vidler, Peter Mullan, Shirley Henderson... It was a unique group of people, all emergent talents who saw it as a big chance to do something memorable.

There are boundless movie clichés about the "energy on a set" but everybody seemed locked into the collective thought: "This is our fucking moment." Filming can be a long, tiring process with lots of standing around between scenes. As a novice, I was aware of how the actors all handled this differently. Some joked with the crew, while others stayed in role, silently incubating the character within them.

Amidst all those stellar new kids on the block, to me the real *Trainspotting* star was an unsung veteran. Cinematographer Brian Tufano was a legend for his work on *Quadrophenia* alone, and I was delighted that he was shooting the film. I never took my eyes of him. Brian wasn't a young guy, but he would put himself through all sorts of physical contortions to get the shot he wanted, and his dedication and enthusiasm were unbelievable.

Being involved in the process of making this movie was a great apprenticeship for me, worth several years at film school. I learned the essential lesson that once you have all the shots you can enjoy the wrap party and say an emotional goodbye to the cast and crew, but a whole new crucial phase of work goes on in the edit. Music, in particular, was always going to be pivotal, given the way the story had been forged and coloured by my own journey through Iggy Pop, Lou Reed, David Bowie, Joy Division and New Order, and further inspired and fuelled by my then obsession with dance music.

However, it was the addition of the 'third ingredient' of Britpop (which I personally couldn't see working in the context of the film) that proved to be the masterstroke. This posited the movie as the go-to film of 'Cool Britannia', that requiem mass for British youth culture as it was sold off to the global marketplace. This sadly ensured that *Trainspotting* would probably be the last film of its kind: a definitive youth-culture movie of Britain to be set in a relatively contemporary era.

As the edit pressed on, despite moving back to London, I studiously avoided seeing cuts of the movie until Danny, Andrew and John were happy. Then, at a screening in Soho, I brought along some of the book's earliest and biggest acolytes, amongst them my editor Robin Robertson, Primal Scream's Bobby Gillespie and Andrew Innes, music writer Paolo Hewitt and Jeff Barrett of Heavenly Records, all of whom I knew wouldn't hold back if they thought the film wasn't up to the mark. I probably spent as much time watching them as I did the movie. After the screening they were first stunned into uncharacteristic silence, then, when they found their voices, breathless with enthusiasm. I was elated, Andrew Macdonald was relieved: *Trainspotting* worked.

We took the film to Cannes and excitedly lined up on the Promenade de la Croisette in front of the paparazzi. Andrew, the ever-cautious producer, said to me: "If it does as well as *Shallow Grave* I'll be delighted." I think I replied: "Fuck that,

it'll be ten times bigger than that yuppie pish." Yes, I was feeling very bullish.

Leftfield, who appeared on the soundtrack, played a rip-roaring set at the Cap d'Antibes party, which was the 1996 festival's hot ticket. It was at that rumbustious event I first met the scores of people who worked on the movie in absolutely essential roles, all whom I'd never seen before and who didn't know me from Adam. But I was intrigued and elated rather than annoyed, knowing that a certain type of wanker will shamelessly try to associate with success, and learning that they proliferate in the film business like possibly no other on Earth. To me such people were simply a barometer, their presence confirming that the picture was going to be absolutely huge.

Trainspotting is now a 20 year-old movie. Last year I got back together in Edinburgh for a week with John Hodge, Andrew Macdonald and Danny Boyle. There was no real sense of, "Where has all the time gone?" What came across strongly was that everybody has been enjoying themselves thoroughly in their creative life over the last couple of decades, and whatever came out of our Big Brother House reunion, that wasn't about to change.

But there was impetus too; after years of discussions there was the collective sense that we had reached the 'now or never' time for the sequel. Joined by Christian Colson, we worked on the source material of *Porno* and three different versions of the script John had subsequently produced over the years. Generally, it was all about the future, looking forward instead of back, but we weren't forgetting what brought us all to this apartment in the shadow of the castle.

We also got out and about. I introduced everybody to friends who I knew had their fingers on the pulse of all aspects of Edinburgh life, in a way that I, living in the USA, could no longer hope to. We chatted, ate, drank, boxed and walked around. John, the main man at this point of the process, was largely silent, but I could tell he was vibing on all this. Nobody listens as aggressively as he does, actively sucking the salient words out of the air, then asking forensically probing questions.

John was inspired, and he did the business. Thanks to him we're all back together on the as-yet-untitled sequel, now joined by Jonny, Ewan, Ewen and Bobby. We're charged with the pretty straightforward task of emulating one of the biggest, most generation-defining movies of all time. Will we pull it off? Of course we fucking well will!

Admittedly, this is always easy for the author to say. I've done my bit, bringing the characters to life and setting down the rough template with the sequel, *Porno*. The essential premise of the book remains intact: Sick Boy returns from London to get involved in the local vice industry, drawing Renton into one last dodgy collaboration, while all the time setting him up for a 'reunion' with a vengeful Begbie, newly released from prison. However, that's simply the bones of a 12 year-old narrative, radically modernised by a predictably bold and stunning adaptation from John Hodge. I was enthralled by the script's brilliant and original set-pieces, the constant ingenuity and the big surprises. Most impressively, as John was working both from the book and from scripts he'd done over ten years ago, it feels like an organic evolution from a 20 year-old film, through a 12 year-old book, into the Edinburgh of the present day.

I'm obviously looking forward to the first day of principal photography. And why wouldn't I be? After all, like all authors, I'm at the casino playing with the house's money.

THE SEQUEL TO *TRAINSPOTTING* IS OUT IN 2017.



Pensive moments for Ewan McGregor, Danny Boyle and Peter Mullan.



Ewen Bremner prepares for Spud's catastrophic speed-fuelled job interview.



A break from the opening-montage footie match.















Design For Life

The story behind *that* poster

WORDS **IAN FREER**

IN ANY RETROSPECTIVE OF STUDENT HALLS-OF-RESIDENCE posters — hello, Che Guevara, *Betty Blue*, Kurt Cobain — 1996 would belong to *Trainspotting*. A collaboration between design company Stylorouge and photographer Lorenzo Agius, it was stunning wall-candy to announce to any prospective housemate/conquest that you were edgy, cool, and in no way had a damp spot above the bed.

While being "From the makers of *Shallow Grave*", *Trainspotting* was in many ways a hard sell: its subject matter was tough, and it had a mostly unknown cast. It was Stylorouge's Mark Blamire who came up with the elegant solution: striking black-and-white imagery adorned with spare orange type. Influences included the minimalist modernist work of Swiss designer Josef Müller-Brockmann, the signage of British Rail, the orange of toxic warning symbols, '90s club culture, the numbering system used in Irvine Welsh's novel, and the individual character posters created for *Reservoir Dogs*. But most important was the photographic style. Blamire had looked at the Beatles photography of Astrid Kirchherr and the "heroin chic" fashion imagery of Albert Watson, but things turned in a grittier direction once Agius came on board.

"I was a big (*Richard*) Avedon fan," he says. "Avedon brought his book out in the '60s about the Midwest, with these great portraits of homeless people. So I wasn't being unique. I was applying what I thought was great, and it had never been done like that before."

The shoot took place during August 1995 in a studio in Shoreditch on the hottest day of the year. "The studio had no air conditioning, everybody was really irritable," remembers Agius. "It was towards the end of filming. They all looked gaunt and wasted." Proceedings started with a group shot, demanded by film company PolyGram.

"Suddenly the air got prickly," recalls Blamire. "They all got on as actors, but when they were in character and forced together into a huddle they became abrasive and jarred off one another." Agius remembers the actors asking, "'Why are we doing this? We wouldn't be seen like this.' Half the characters didn't like each other."

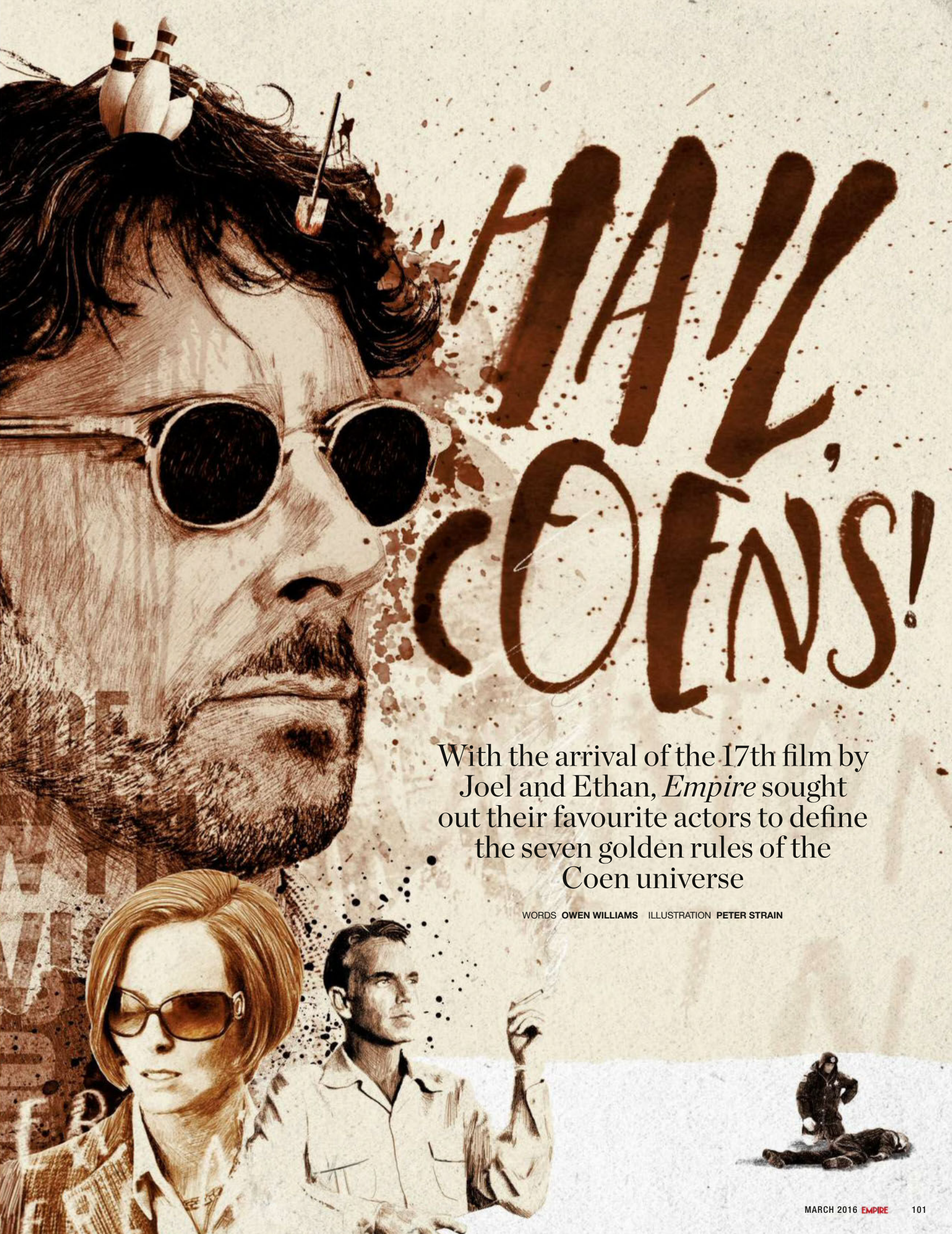
The mood lightened when it came to the individual shots. Blamire and Agius had ear-marked key moments from the script — Renton (Ewan McGregor) soaking wet after crawling out of the toilet, Sick Boy (Jonny Lee Miller) channelling 007 — and created little vignettes to showcase the compelling characters.

"It was the most memorable time I have ever spent on a photo shoot," says Blamire. "Being in the same room as Robert Carlyle being Begbie was hilarious but intimidating. He did not hold back, smashing open cans of Tennent's, effing and jeffing, dropping C-bombs straight to camera. It felt like it was going to be special."

Sure enough, the poster became an icon of 'Cool Britannia'. From French Connection shop displays to a *Trumpton/Camberwick Green/Chigley* box set, it got everywhere. It is now on permanent display in the V&A museum. "I think the 'less is more' approach struck a chord," says Blamire. "Its simplicity made it easy to parody so increased its longevity... Or maybe it's just a bloody amazing bit of poster design for a fantastic film."

AN EXHIBITION ABOUT THE MAKING OF THE *TRAINSPOTTING* POSTER WILL TAKE PLACE AT THE PROUD ARCHIVIST GALLERY, LONDON, LATER THIS YEAR.





HAIL, COENS!

With the arrival of the 17th film by Joel and Ethan, *Empire* sought out their favourite actors to define the seven golden rules of the Coen universe

WORDS **OWEN WILLIAMS** ILLUSTRATION **PETER STRAIN**

THE PLAYERS



MICHAEL BADALUCCO
Caspar's Driver (*Miller's Crossing*), George 'Baby Face' Nelson (*O Brother, Where Art Thou?*), Frank (*The Man Who Wasn't There*)



JON POLITO
Johnny Caspar (*Miller's Crossing*), Lou Breeze (*Barton Fink*), Mr. Bumstead (*The Hudsucker Proxy*), Da Fino (*The Big Lebowski*), Creighton Tolliver (*The Man Who Wasn't There*)



JEFF BRIDGES
Jeffrey 'The Dude' Lebowski (*The Big Lebowski*), Rooster Cogburn (*True Grit*)



PETER STORMARE
Gaear Grimsrud (*Fargo*), Uli Kunkel (*The Big Lebowski*)



JOSH BROLIN
Llewelyn Moss (*No Country For Old Men*), Tom Chaney (*True Grit*), Eddie Mannix (*Hail, Caesar!*)



TILDA SWINTON
Katie Cox (*Burn After Reading*), Hedda Hopper (*Hail, Caesar!*)



GEORGE CLOONEY
Ulysses Everett McGill (*O Brother, Where Art Thou?*), Miles Massey (*Intolerable Cruelty*), Harry Pfarrer (*Burn After Reading*), Baird Whitlock (*Hail, Caesar!*)



BILLY BOB THORNTON
Ed Crane (*The Man Who Wasn't There*), Howard D. Doyle (*Intolerable Cruelty*)



M. EMMET WALSH
Loren Visser (*Blood Simple*), Machine Shop Ear-Bender (*Raising Arizona*)



FIFTEEN YEARS AGO, NOT long after they'd worked together for the first time on Homeric bluegrass jaunt *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, Joel and Ethan Coen brought George Clooney a pitch. It consisted of a title — *Hail, Caesar!* — a vague premise and a single line. Clooney would play an actor who gets kidnapped, and an aww-shucks cowboy character would say, "This is bad for movie stars everywhere."

"That was it!" an incredulous Clooney tells *Empire*. "They were just howling with laughter about it. So when I was doing press for *O Brother*, I was saying we were doing *Hail, Caesar!* next, even though they hadn't written it. Then I said the same after *Intolerable Cruelty* (2003). Then Joel called me up about 18 months ago and said, 'Y'know, you've been telling everybody we're doing *Hail, Caesar!* for so long, we had to write the sonuvabitch!' They wrote it and sent it over and it was just exactly what you'd imagine."

But given the brothers' eclectic output, what should we imagine? Their last movie, *Inside Llewyn Davis* (2013), was a melancholy, circular saunter around the '60s New York folk scene. The one before, *True Grit* (2010), was a sort-of (but not really) remake of a John Wayne Western. So it of course makes sense that *Hail, Caesar!* should be a '50s Hollywood-set kidnap caper which revolves around the making of a Biblical epic and features lavish song-and-dance numbers.

Because this is the Coenverse, which, since its Big Bang 32 years ago with *Blood Simple* has seen the siblings segue from deadpan crime thrillers to screwball comedies via oddball dramas, almost-musicals and even something approaching a mainstream romcom. They are, it seems, a law unto themselves, dancing to their own tunes and answerable to nobody but each other. But don't mistake any of this for randomness. There is, insist the actors who most regularly inhabit their worlds, order here. The Coens abide by their own rules...







1. CAST SMART

"It's like what Lenin said... You look for the person who will benefit..."
The Dude, *The Big Lebowski*

From *Blood Simple* onwards, Joel and Ethan keep circling back to the same actors, and exhibit impeccable taste while doing so. They certainly have their favourites, and often write parts with a particular performer in mind. Clooney was brought 2000's *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, and Jeff Bridges was the first and only choice for *The Big Lebowski*'s (1998) shambolic Dude. "I met them in a bagel shop and they told me they were writing a script for me," Bridges tells us. "I guess I've got some aspects of The Dude that shine through!"

So certain are they of their choices, they rarely demand auditions. Only Josh Brolin recalls being made to do so. Now an established part of the Coens' unofficial rep company, making his third feature appearance for them as *Hail, Caesar!*'s studio fixer Eddie Mannix, he says the experience of trying out for Llewelyn Moss in *No Country For Old Men* (2007) at a time when he had "no value" was so bad that he was sure he didn't have the part. "Joel just stared at me the whole time," he laughs now. "I don't think he said five words."

Above: Joel and Ethan Coen, Josh Brolin and George Clooney consult the 1950s iPad on the set of next month's *Hail Caesar!*. **Right:** M. Emmet Walsh in a sweat in Coens debut *Blood Simple* (1984). **Below right:** Gabriel Byrne and Jon Polito in gangster caper *Miller's Crossing* (1990).

What makes them able to attract exactly the casts they want is the quality and meticulousness of their writing. Their screenplays are, says Tilda Swinton, "like reading the annotations of a film you can imagine completely clearly as if you've already seen it: utterly precise and rhythmic and full of life and detail and different voices."

Jon Polito, who's been cast no fewer than five times by the Coens, recalls that reading *Miller's Crossing* (1990) was "like reading music. The dialogue flowed like a symphony. There is no comparison to other screenplays. They create scripts that are a joy to read and a challenge to live up to as an actor."

2. STICK TO THE SCRIPT

"Have you got a better idea?"
Moses the Clock Man, *The Hudsucker Proxy*

The brothers have yet to reveal what their writing process is; it's never been something they've felt the need to discuss in any detail. Brolin recounts them laughing at him for reading Robert McKee's screenwriting bible, *Story*.

"I said, 'Well, what do you do? You never say anything! Tell me how you write a script!' Ethan goes, 'Okay, you want to know what we do? We sit down and think what would be a cool scene. And then we write that. Then we think what would be cool to see after that, and then we write that scene, and eventually we have a movie.' That sounds like bullshit to me. They just have an intrinsic understanding of how to structure a story perfectly. And based on that, they can act as if they're just going, 'What would be cool next?'"

Clooney and Billy Bob Thornton both insist that everything in the script ends up on screen. There are no deleted scenes; the Coens only shoot what they know they're going to use. And while their loose dialogue may occasionally sound improvised, it very rarely is.

"That's just a sign of great writing," says Bridges. "Every 'fuck' in *The Big Lebowski*, every 'man' was always in the perfect sweet spot. I was very concerned about putting it right where they had it. You could do it another way but it wouldn't be as good."

This isn't to say that the Coens aren't open to suggestions. Thornton asked if he could say, "Heavens to Betsy, Birdy!" in *The Man Who Wasn't There* (2001), having heard it in a *Snagglepuss* cartoon and felt it was something his character might come out with. Permission was granted. Michael Badalucco, in the same film, decided that, since he was being called on to ride a pig called Garibaldi, he should shout the Italian freedom fighter's famous line, "*Domani a Palermo!*" ("Tomorrow we take Palermo!") Again, this was deemed acceptable.

Peter Stormare says the only thing he ever questioned was "Pancakes House" in *Fargo* (1996). "I said, 'Shouldn't it be Pancake House?' And they said, 'Yes, but you always say it plural.' So that was that."

3. NO YELLING, NO ARGUING

"I'm perfectly calm, Dude."
Walter Sobchak, *The Big Lebowski*

Given they have everything laid out in such fine detail before production begins, it should come as no surprise that the Coens run a low-key, peaceful and ordered set. "Very relaxed and profoundly systematic at the same time," is how Swinton puts it. If they ever argue, it's behind the closed doors of the writing room, so by the time the cameras are rolling they're entirely on the same page.

Clooney says he's never seen them irritate one another, or sensed any kind of division of duty. Several of *Empire*'s interviewees observe that Joel is the more taciturn of the two, while Ethan paces a lot. A few enjoy the brothers' propensity to laugh loudly and distractingly during a take. "They have this kind of "Yeah... yeah..." thing that they do, like geese honking," says Clooney. "They kind of hem and haw through it. My favourite thing is, when Ethan comes over to give you a note, you can say very loudly, 'That's a much better note than Joel gave me!'"

The only difference of opinion between the brothers that Jeff Bridges can recall happened while they were shooting The Dude's dream sequence for *The Big Lebowski*. "When The Dude's hitting the bowling pins with his head, one of the brothers thought I should cringe because the pins hitting me would be painful. The other one was like, 'Oh, really? I thought it was supposed to be sort of delightful!' It went back and forth: 'Cringe!' 'Delight!' So we shot it both ways in the end."

In the finished film we don't see the Dude hit the pins at all.

4. KEEP IT SIMPLE

"The more you look, the less you really know."
Freddy Riedenschneider, *The Man Who Wasn't There*

As with the writing, the shooting schedule is worked out to the nth degree. "Most films you'll do a master shot then a tight two-shot and then an over-the-shoulder and a close-up," says Clooney, who started directing features himself two years after *O Brother*. "The Coens are like, 'We'll just do the first three lines in this wide shot and a close-up over here,' and that's all you shoot. They don't even give themselves the option of doing something else."

Occasional on-set problems have engendered peculiar solutions. Insisting that M. Emmett Walsh's character, sleazy P. I. Loren Visser, blow smoke rings in *Blood Simple*, the brothers were stymied by his inability to do so. A smoke ring-blowing contraption was sourced, but that didn't work either. Eventually, says Walsh, "This little Texan prop girl they'd hired just went, 'Gimme that cigar!' and she stood right beside the camera, blowing smoke ring after smoke ring. I was like, 'Wow, this is the way movies are made!' An hour later or something — we were shooting in this roadhouse in the middle of nowhere outside of Austin — I walked out and there was this little girl sitting on the back porch, puking her heart out. I said, 'That poor girl! She gave her life to this fucking movie!'"

The musical and synchronised swimming sequences in *Hail, Caesar!* proved somewhat more challenging than smoke rings. Brolin says they made "for an even more laconic day than usual... That's how you can tell they're stressed."

Indeed, it seems the bigger a production becomes, the less at ease Joel and Ethan feel. Their extravagant Capra tribute *The Hudsucker Proxy* (1994) proved a misfire, something both Thornton and Bridges put down to the budget getting away from the brothers in a way they found uncomfortable. They've worked within smaller means ever since in order to keep full creative control.

5: IF IT AIN'T BROKE...

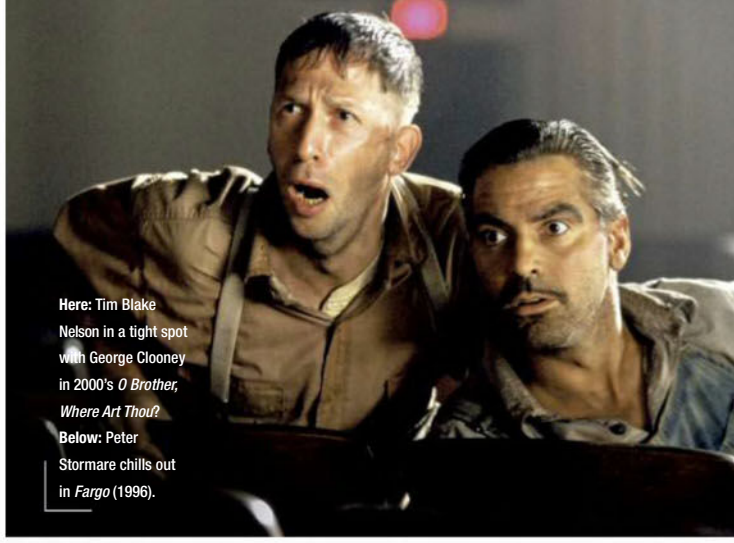
"I don't want Fop! I'm a Dapper Dan man!"
Ulysses Everett McGill, *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*

For all the variety of their output, Joel and Ethan Coen have proven largely resistant to change. "I think Joel cut his hair once," offers Tilda Swinton, "but it grew back."

When they made *Blood Simple* back in 1984, they may have been "two quiet little kids [who'd] never done anything," as Walsh puts it, but the brutal Texan noir brimmed with such confidence it heralded their arrival as fully formed filmmakers.

"I read the script, and I thought I could do something with my character," recalls Walsh. "He was kind of a Sydney Greenstreet, and it was funny. I knew that character and I knew what I could do with him. I thought maybe I could work with that, and then go and do another real movie. I didn't know if they had a movie with *Blood Simple* or not..."

As it turned out, they had more than a movie. They had a blueprint for a career. The ingredients are all there:



Here: Tim Blake Nelson in a tight spot with George Clooney in 2000's *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* **Below:** Peter Stormare chills out in *Fargo* (1996).







Above: Joel and Jeff Bridges prepare to trip in 1998's *The Big Lebowski*. **Here:** Tilda Swinton as real-life '50s Hollywood gossip maven Hedda Hopper.

LEARN AFTER READING

A HANDY PRIMER TO THE COENS' KEY INFLUENCES



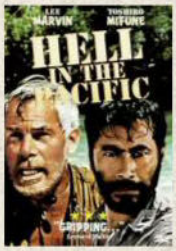
DASHIELL HAMMETT
American heavyweight of hardboiled fiction.
INFLUENCE: Hammett's work bestrides the Coens like a colossus. The title *Blood Simple* comes from Hammett's *Red Harvest*. *Miller's Crossing* 'borrows' liberally from *Red Harvest* and *The Glass Key*.



***ADVISE & CONSENT* (1962)**
Otto Preminger's starry (Henry Fonda, Peter Lawford) neo-noir, which charts the fall-out of a controversial Presidential nomination.
INFLUENCE: *Burn After Reading* plays comic variations on its political shenanigans. The Coens also made their own Super 8 version as kids.



PRESTON STURGES
The first writer-turned-director, a master at cynical screwball comedy.
INFLUENCE: *Raising Arizona* and *The Hudsucker Proxy* revel in the silly names, satire and pratfalls of Sturges. *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* is the title of the film adaptation of a fictional book in Sturges' Sullivan's Travels.



***HELL IN THE PACIFIC* (1968)**
John Boorman's drama sees a US pilot (Lee Marvin) share an island with a Japanese officer (Toshirô Mifune) in a game of cat and mouse.
INFLUENCE: *No Country For Old Men*. As Joel says, "Almost no dialogue, a bizarre score, and guys fighting and doing lots of stuff with their hands."



FLANNERY O'CONNOR
American novelist and essayist, a fine exponent of Southern Gothic.
INFLUENCE: *Barton Fink*. O'Connor's *The Enduring Chill* has a ceiling stain-fixated character. Cf. also the theme of Southern psychology (*The Man Who Wasn't There*) and the religious elements of *A Serious Man* (2009).



***THE BIG SLEEP* (1939)**
Raymond Chandler's private-dick classic, the first to feature Phillip Marlowe, is all colours of convoluted.
INFLUENCE: *The Big Lebowski*. "We wanted to do a Chandler kind of story," says Joel. "A hopelessly complex plot that's ultimately unimportant." IAN FREER

characters farcically failing to achieve their dubious ambitions; extreme violence; deadpan humour; a slightly arch, distancing tone. Its follow-up was another botched-crime yarn (Walsh cameoed as the Machine Shop Ear-Bender who talks about finding a severed head in the road), but *Raising Arizona* (1987) defied expectations, swapping hard-boiled for slapstick. To a large degree, the Coens have alternated 'serious' projects with knockabout runarounds since.

"I've only ever done their knockabout ones," chuckles Clooney. "They always finish a serious one and then I do the next one and everybody goes, 'Well, it can't be a serious one...'"

The blueprint hasn't always yielded success, though, as *Hudsucker* showed. Flirting closer to the mainstream with *Intolerable Cruelty* (2003) also proved a stumble. "We expected a standing ovation like we'd had before (*for* O Brother) at the Venice Film Festival," says Clooney, "but when it finished everyone just turned and glared at us. I looked at Catherine Zeta-Jones and said, 'Run!'"

Some critics have been put off by a perceived Kubrickian coldness, a lack of emotion, to their films; J. Hoberman went so far as to describe their style as "artful contempt". Bridges dismisses that as a product of "where they put the camera. It's right where it wants to be, and it's not overblown. Nothing's over-emphasised." Others have taken against their obsession with idiots ("There is limited comedy value in characters being just stupid," wrote *The Guardian*'s Peter Bradshaw of *Burn After Reading* in 2008). Idiots who are often played by Clooney...

"They do revel in other people's idiocy," he admits. "But listen: what better way to tell a story? Most stories have, at their heart, some sort of idiot that's caused all the problems. I've now done four massive idiots for them. After *Burn After Reading* I thought I'd completed my idiot trilogy, and then they brought me *Hail, Caesar!* which is even stupider than the other three. They just love to play with that. They enjoy a useful idiot."

6. MAINTAIN SPLENDID ISOLATION

"Nobody knows anybody. Not that well."
Tom Reagan, *Miller's Crossing*

Clooney says he doesn't see the brothers often outside work, but when he does, it's like picking up a conversation exactly where it was left. Thornton, too, says they aren't particularly close, although he thinks their oddness can be over-stated. "They're more Frank Zappa than Captain Beefheart," he believes: more accessibly strange than alienatingly weird.

Brolin says he has better conversations with Joel, but spends more time with Ethan. "I went out to dinner with Ethan once, just the two of us, and he kept looking down. This was before people were constantly looking at their phones. Finally I said, 'What are you looking at?' And I looked under the table and he had a novel open! I was like, 'What?! Dude, you can do that if there are six people at the table. You can't do that if there's only one other person!'

He apologised. I think he felt bad. I have no idea what he was reading. Probably a romance novel." He insists Joel's favourite director is "hands-down, Adrian Lyne. That sounds like an affectation but it isn't. He genuinely loves *Flashdance*. He loves all of them. I don't think Ethan's even seen them."

Their place these days in Hollywood is that of respected outsiders — except they are insiders, too. "How do they fit in Hollywood? How does Hollywood fit in them?" asks Swinton rhetorically. Steven Spielberg's *Bridge Of Spies* boasted a Coens rewrite. *Fargo* enjoys an afterlife as a critically lauded television series: one that its first-season star Thornton says is absolutely "Coenesque" despite their lack of hands-on involvement. Clooney's next film as a director, *Suburbicon* — starring Coens alumni Brolin, Matt Damon and Julianne Moore — is from an unmade Coens script he's admired for years.

7. AVOID EASY DEFINITION

"I'm fucked if I know what we did."
CIA Superior, *Burn After Reading*

When *Empire* challenges Clooney to define the word "Coenesque", he decides it's "violence and absurdity and dingbats". Brolin plumps for "unconscious originality" and says they're "the last of the great absurdists". Badalucco, meanwhile, insists it's "idiosyncratic specificity" and for Bridges it's "seeing the unusual in the usual". Polito agrees: "I've always defined art as 'the familiar seen through new eyes', and that's them!"

"There's a sense of humour that's like a club that certain people belong to that gets the joke," says Thornton. "They've found this feather, and certain people get tickled by it. The Coen brothers are not for everybody, but they probably reach a broader audience than you might expect. So maybe there's hope for humanity." ■

***HAIL CAESAR!* IS OUT ON MARCH 4 AND WILL BE REVIEWED IN THE NEXT ISSUE.**

Truth be told

Cate Blanchett heads over to the dark side in her new movie about what happens when the people making the news become the news

WORDS **TERRI WHITE** PORTRAITS **GUSTAVO PAPALEO**

• GUARDIAN NEWS & MEDIA





Oscar bid #1: Robert Redford and Cate Blanchett as the journalists of *Truth*, with Bruce Greenwood as the president of CBS News.

Bzzzzzzzzz, bzzzzzz. Pretty much the second Cate Blanchett opens her mouth, the drilling starts. The walls of the Soho hotel suite we're in vibrate. There's a pause, a sigh of relief and as she once more begins to talk... *Bang bang bang bang*. Pause. *Bzzzzzzzzz, bzzzzzz*. *Empire* might be beginning to lose our mind, but Blanchett, ever the consummate, polished professional, barely breaks concentration or flow. She shoots the wall an occasional laugh or frown, but that's her only acknowledgement of the *Home Improvement* episode taking place next door.

The truth is, she's nothing short of delightful. "I have that too!" she says of our dress as we meet. "It looks better on you!" (It doesn't.) Later she will offer *Empire* a chunk of her chocolate, urging us not to be shy about our portion. (We're not.) Maybe she's more sympathetic to journalists today, speaking as she is about her role in docudrama *Truth* as *60 Minutes*' boozy, wet-eyed producer Mary Mapes, who broke the story contesting George W. Bush's military service record alongside CBS anchor Dan Rather (played by Robert Redford) and found herself in the firing line when doubts were cast on the veracity of the story.

It's one of two titles she's currently promoting — *Carol*'s the other — with both being lined up for Oscars ("Cate Blanchett's biggest Oscar competitor is herself!" shrieked one excited newspaper), but right now, Blanchett's not worried about pocketing a third Academy Award. What she's really concerned about is the fact that she's going to be filling six pages of this, her son's favourite magazine.

"That's somewhat daunting! Just big pictures? Oh my God, do they have to be any of my words, or can they just be your words? I'm all worded out."

It turns out though, that on the subject of *Truth*, filmmaking and female equality, she's anything but. *Bzzzzzzzzz*. That must be our cue to start.

What did you know about the real Mary Mapes before you signed on for the film?

I knew nothing about Mary Mapes. I knew the Abu Ghraib story [1], though I don't think I knew that she produced it. I knew the Bush Guard story [2] and that Dan Rather had fronted it. I remember at the time wondering why the story had sunk.

What was the first meeting with her like?

It was great, we met at The Pierre hotel in New York, where she would stay when she would came into town from Dallas to finish a story. So it was kind of apt. She came to see my play — I was on stage doing *The Maids* [3] — and must have been deeply concerned about this actress who was about to play her!

What kind of questions did she have for you?

I had a lot of questions for her actually. The tables were turned; I was doing my poor man's investigative journalism. I was interested in just seeing where it all sat with her now. It became clear really quickly that she'd moved on — it was ten years ago — but there was part of the wound that hadn't closed up. In the same way I don't think it really has for Dan (*Rather*) and I don't think it really has for CBS. I found that very interesting. I wanted to see what pieces of the puzzle, what series of events, stood out for her. I wanted to know about her relationships with the various characters and her perspective on all of them. Who stood by her, who stuck together, who didn't. I think that was a big thing for her and Dan. They were very loyal to each

FOOTNOTES

[1] In April 2004, CBS broadcasted a report, including leaked photos, detailing prisoner abuse by American soldiers at Abu Ghraib. Multiple soldiers were dismissed and several imprisoned.

[2] The story, which aired in September 2004, relied on six memos, which claimed that Bush was given preferential treatment and went AWOL. The documents are now widely believed to be fakes and CBS failed to authenticate the documents before broadcast.



Oscar bid #2: falling for Rooney Mara in *Carol*.



Playing The Virgin Queen in 1998's *Elizabeth*.



As Galadriel, with Sir Ian McKellen's Gandalf, in The Hobbit: The Battle Of The Five Armies.

FOOTNOTES

3 Jean Genet's play about two housemaids who dream up sadomasochistic rituals when left alone by their mistress. *The Guardian* described it as a "demented tale of desperation and destruction".

other but they were also very loyal to the organisation and to the ideals that had got them into being investigative journalists in the first place. So I think they felt, and still feel, that sense of being betrayed by the organisation and betrayed by the profession as there weren't a lot of people who spoke up for them.

Is there still a sense of anger from her?
I don't think it's anger anymore. A lot has changed in the last ten years in terms of erosion of how stories are put together. Not just in television news, but in news generally. This took place three years before the Twittersphere. Twitter is an interesting tool for a journalist but if we only read headlines and are only reacting and reporting to headlines, then news becomes very thin. Facts matter less now than they did when this took place. I think Mary's disappointed by that erosion.

Were you surprised by anything about her?
I don't see that my job as an actor is to judge a character. You want to keep all the elements open so that an audience can make a judgement ; you're not telling them what to think. I had trawled through the internet of course. She gave a few interviews to minor outlets — I saw this woman who was in a state of lockdown, quite defensive and sort of humourless, in a way. And you meet Mary and the actual Mary is so vibrant, so engaged and hilarious. She's like a fireball and is very charismatic and compelling, can command a room and also has the most exquisite ability to listen. I found trying to compare that Mary to the Mary in lockdown an interesting journey to make. I held on to those two impressions.

Dan and Mary's bond is almost familial, especially in contrast with her relationship with her father, which is incredibly dysfunctional. Was she quite open about it?
I felt like I could ask her about it because she'd been so open about it in her memoir.

About her dad?
Yep. It was interesting seeing that whenever she mentioned him, a wall went up. She came from a very violent, hilarious household populated by her sisters who she loves deeply and her mother who she misses desperately. So her sense of family is very strong. She would often be the family clown. When her father would fall asleep at the table, she'd get the tea cosy and pop it on his head and dress him up to make everyone else laugh and try and find the levity in a hideous situation. I think that shows a bravado but also a deep generosity; an understanding that she had to make it right for everyone else. Those details you can't seed in directly, because it's not a biopic. The story takes off like a freight train. It's not a biopic of Dan or Mary. I think it's an interesting film because it's not.

It was your first time working with Robert Redford — what was that like?
Great! I didn't know what to call him. I was a bit — well, you know, more than a bit — awestruck, trying to be cool. You meet him the first time and he comes in mid-conversation, like he's already known you for two-and-a-half years: "It's great to see you again." So he puts everyone at ease immediately. As an actor he's so disarmingly natural that we would be sitting talking around a scene and he'd start saying something and I'd think, "We've had this conversation," and then realise he was running lines. There was just this organic ramp from

conversation into performance, it was seamless. But you know, it's daunting working for him (*laughs*) — that was a Freudian slip, wasn't it? — working *with* him... Because he's had such an enormous impact on American culture and continues to do so in so many ways. His body of work as an actor is just remarkable. These days he picks and chooses his roles, and I was really pleased that he picked and chose this one.

Apparently one of the things that convinced him was you signing on...
I would like to think so. Entirely down to me! When I said to (*director*) Jamie [4], "I'd love to do it," my first question was, "Who's going to play Dan Rather?" and his first choice was Redford. And I said, "Is there anything I can do help?" I just wanted an excuse to call him. It's perfect casting. Not least because he's an astonishing actor, but also, he was in *All The President's Men* so you get the residual iconography of that film. It automatically makes you remember the nature of that movie and how far the process of news has changed. Just like *All The Presidents Men* is not about Nixon, this is not about Bush; this is about the process of gathering news, and where does fact and truth sit within it?

And did you call him?
No, because he said yes so quickly there was no chance to. Damn it!

It's James Vanderbilt's first film as director. Did that give you any doubts?
Well, we spoke on the phone and then we met and I just instantly warmed to him. Jamie's so buoyant and humble but engaged and sure, which is a great combination. Sometimes — and we all do this — when we're in uncharted waters, we feel like we have to know the answers to everything, but he was very collaborative. The great thing about the screenplay he'd written was that I could already see the shape of the film. He'd put so much of his directorial eye into the screenplay, so I didn't know that someone else could direct it in the same way that he was going to.

You're basically going to be competing with yourself in the Oscar race with *Carol* and *Truth*. How much do those things really matter?
I don't have a sense of consequence. I just want both films to find an audience. I think *Carol* is absolutely beautiful and I've sat with that film for a long time. With *Truth*, it's a really provocative, fascinating subject matter. I'm really proud to be involved with it. The rest... I don't like to have my fingerprints all over that stuff, you know.

And you're set to play Lucille Ball?
Yeah, I don't know who broke that news too early but it's very embryonic. So I think (*Aaron*) Sorkin's going to write it, he was interested [5]. We're still in the disucssion phase but she's a huge heroine of mine, creatively but also she was an astonishing producer. She was a little trailblazer. I find the territory that she occupies both creatively and culturally really rich ground.

Let's talk about the Jennifer Lawrence essay on equal pay in Hollywood. Have you read it?
Yes, I read it yesterday.

What was your take on it?
I thought it was fantastic. I thought it was timely, brave, and I thought it was necessary. I applaud her saying that because, forget the film industry for one moment, it encourages women in other industries to say, "You know what, I'm not receiving equal pay for equal work here." You're not saying, "I want to be paid squillions of dollars." That's not her point. The point is, I'm drawing a lot of audience into this film — as much as the men. We're all doing equal work. Why simply because, as she put it, "I have a vagina," am I not negotiating or being negotiated for, or not respected enough? It's a basic, basic, basic thing. And you cannot change workplace culture until you get to first base. And first base is probably the vote, but that was a very, very long time ago now. So we've just got to get home.

Her likability point was very interesting, about not wanting to be seen as aggressive.
I've found this. If you get asked a question and it's, say, a veiled sexist question, and you call the person on it, they then report that you're strident or don't suffer fools [6]. It's like, I just asked what was behind that question, I didn't raise my voice, I didn't shout at you. I just questioned your question. I found that yesterday in an interview. A journalist was asking about this very subject, talking about "strong", "strident", "opinionated", and I was thinking, "Wow, you wouldn't even be using these adjectives if I was a man." And I said, "Am I annoying you?" and he got really defensive. You know, it really benefits men. Equality benefits men. To change workplace culture, it's a much more creative environment when everyone can pitch in equally. I do think there's a critical mass of women talking about it now and I think it helps people when someone of her influence and also of her generation comes out and just says it like it is. Then it does give courage to other young women to say, "You know what, I'm having a similar experience and I'll stand and be counted."

How much has changed since you started making movies?
It does feel a little bit like *Groundhog Day*, where every year you'll have the conversation, "This is a great year, lots of strong roles for women," and you'll think there's always great performances by women, they just have to pick through a lot of rubbish to find them. I do think that the language around it is finally changing and that's in your camp too. But it's still remarked upon — the very fact that we're still sitting here in 2015 having this conversation. [But now] it's less like you're made to feel like you're whinging and more that you're stating fact. There has been a lag where women felt they couldn't talk about this as they didn't want to be seen to be self-interested or complaining and therefore uninteresting to work with.

Can you imagine a day when we're not having this conversation?
Yeah, I hope it's tomorrow. Yeah, I can, I can. Because it does benefit everyone and it benefits audiences, which is why we all do this in the first place. Female-led films are interesting to men, to boys and they make money. Women are great actors and great producers, they're good distributors and people want to see the stories, because they're interesting. At the time I made *Elizabeth*, I remember being presented with a whole load of lead roles across different time frames that were ostensibly telling the same story and often you felt like somehow the character was interesting and the story was not. You know, the writing for women has become really interesting.

In the film industry specifically, what's the biggest challenge still for women?
Equality is equality, it's just a no-brainer. Anyone in any industry should be paid equally for equal work. That's just a bottom line. So that's not a challenge; that just has to change.

***TRUTH* IS OUT ON MARCH 4 AND WILL BE REVIEWED IN THE NEXT ISSUE.**

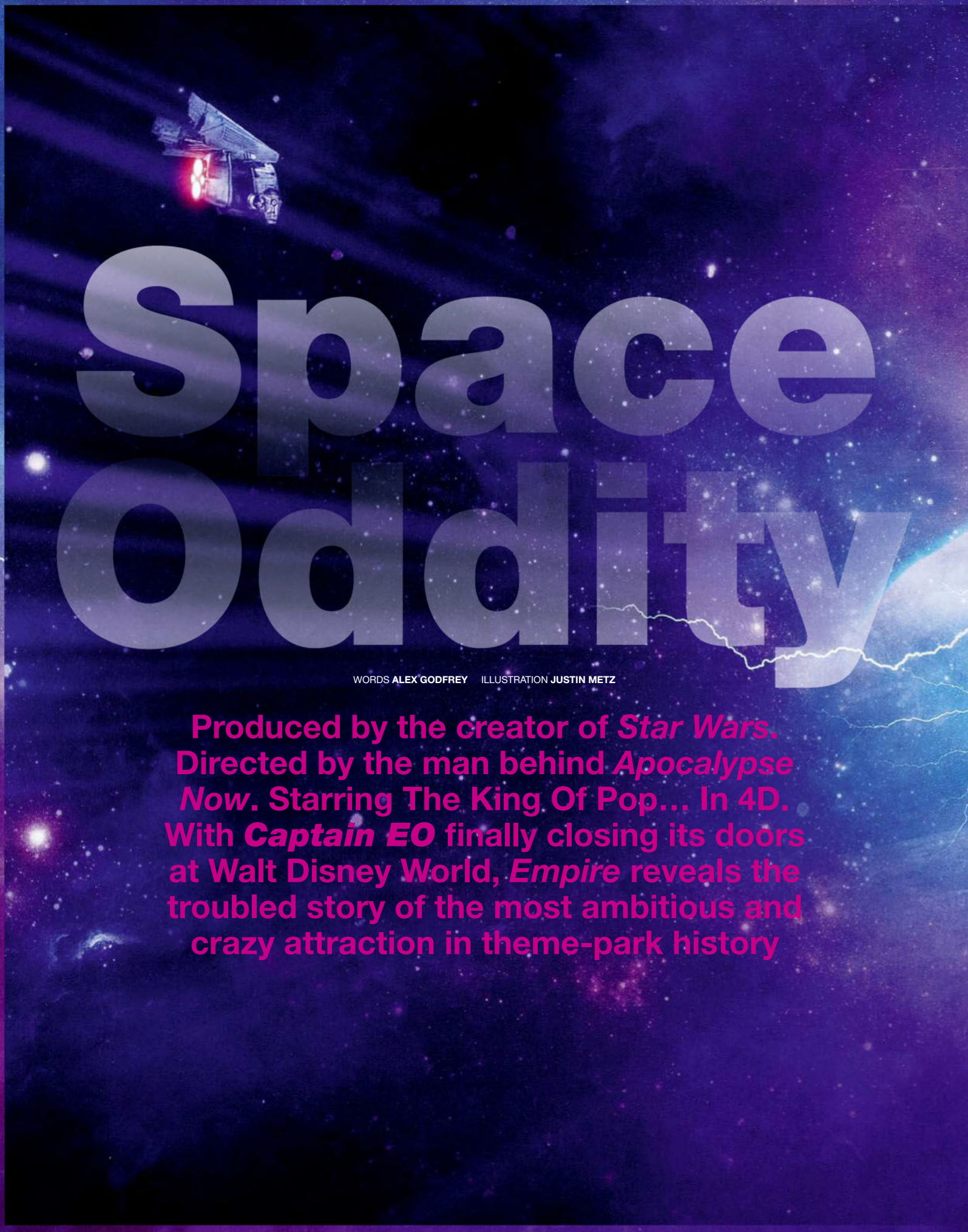
FOOTNOTES

[4] James Vanderbilt was a writer on *The Amazing Spider-Man* and *White House Down* and produced *Zodiac*.

[5] The biopic is being produced by Lucille Ball's two children: Lucie Arnaz and Desi Arnaz Jr. Aaron Sorkin is yet to be confirmed.

[6] Jennifer Lawrence's essay, 'Why Do I Make Less Than My Male Co-Stars?' was published in Lena Dunham's *Lenny* newsletter in October 2015. In it she wrote: "I'm over trying to find the 'adorable' way to state my opinion and still be likable! Fuck that. I don't think I've ever worked for a man in charge who spent time contemplating what angle he should use to have his voice heard."





Space Oddity

WORDS **ALEX GODFREY** ILLUSTRATION **JUSTIN METZ**

Produced by the creator of *Star Wars*. Directed by the man behind *Apocalypse Now*. Starring The King Of Pop… In 4D. With *Captain EO* finally closing its doors at Walt Disney World, *Empire* reveals the troubled story of the most ambitious and crazy attraction in theme-park history





MJ on set with George Lucas and Francis Ford Coppola.

IN AUGUST 1985,

George Lucas announced he was working on "the ultimate movie experience". He said it would involve "spaceships and space battles", but also "singing and dancing". Collaborator Francis Ford Coppola pitched things a bit more loftily. He described this new directorial project as the tale of "an adventurer or an emissary of light — almost a messiah — going to some dark place in the universe... An attractive theme for pretty much anyone who seeks to bring about change to the world in areas where things are dark or oppressive or unsatisfactory. It really is culture that has the power to lead issues of economics and politics."

Sure. However you frame it, *Captain EO* sounded bonkers.

Lucas and Coppola were talking about a project instigated by recently appointed Disney CEO Michael Eisner, who was keen to revitalise the then-struggling company and draw star power to its theme parks. He, Frank Wells (president) and Jeffrey Katzenberg (studio chairman) wanted to tune Disneyland into pop culture, and integrate their park and movie divisions. So it made sense to start with one of the world's most beloved performers — someone who had just released the biggest-selling album of all time, and who was also a huge Disneyland fan and a regular visitor (often in disguise).

Eisner, Wells and Katzenberg approached Michael Jackson, asking if he'd be interested in doing an extended 3D music video. He was, and requested George Lucas' involvement. As it turned out, Disney was already working with Lucas on the *Star Tours* ride, and he signed up to executive produce.

"Michael Eisner asked us to consider what we would do if we had Michael Jackson, George Lucas and 3D," says Rick Rothschild, former executive show director at Imagineering, Disney's theme-park creative team. They came up with three story ideas. The first involved Jackson staying in Disneyland after-hours and the *Pirates Of The Caribbean* ride coming to life. The second had Jackson as an elf-like creature battling an evil ice queen. In the third he was a space captain, transforming a bleak, industrial planet into a place of joy and light through the power of song and dance. They called it *The Intergalactic Music Man*. Everybody favoured that one, and Jackson "was enchanted by the story", says Rothschild.

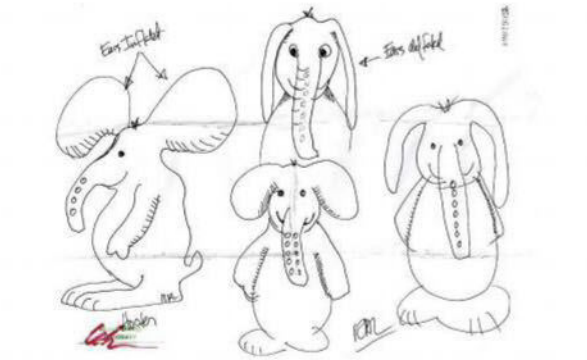
Lucas chose Rusty Lemorande to produce and script, as he'd worked with a superstar (Barbra Streisand, on *Yentl*), had produced a musical of sorts (*Electric Dreams*), had been developing his own 3D space film, and was a theme-park fanatic. Jackson wanted Steven Spielberg to direct, but he was busy on *The Color Purple*, so Lucas suggested Coppola, who signed up, polished some dialogue, changed the title to *Captain EO* — from the Greek "*eos*", meaning "dawn" — and they had lift-off.

THEIR FIRST PRIORITY WAS TO

cast the only other main role in the film, that of the Supreme Leader, the twisted and hideous evil queen of *Captain EO*'s darkened world who, through the power of Jackson's music, would be transformed into a beautiful, younger woman. A 20 year-old dancer was cast for the character post-transformation, while Shelley Duvall was cast as the pre-enlightened antagonist. But after









finding the extensive and ghoulish prosthetic make-up rendered her unrecognisable, Duvall left the project. "The original make-up design covered her entire face," recalls Lemorande. "Shelley felt, 'You're not gonna know it's me, I'm just a voice.' She didn't wanna do it."

So Coppola hired Anjelica Huston, fresh from her Oscar-winning performance in *Prizzi's Honor*, who asked if her evil queen could later be transformed into her without creature make-up. Coppola agreed. "It made a lot of sense — like, 'Duh!'" says Lemorande. "I felt bad — we had to say to the young girl, 'Sorry, it's not gonna work now.' But that's Hollywood."

Evil Huston is one of the film's strongest assets, a monstrous, spindly affair, all talons and horns and hisses. Her lair, meanwhile, is a blackened, mechanical mass of wires and vapour designed, an Imagineer said at the time, to be a mix of "industrialism and fascism and a lot of other unpleasant things". While the planet and its inhabitants seem inspired by H. R. Giger's *Alien* aesthetic, Captain EO comes with a menagerie of sidekicks that could be fresh escapees from one of Jim Henson's bright, fuzzy dreamscapes (Lemorande had approached Henson for the film, but he declined). There's Major Domo, a robot with a smaller robot inside his back; the Geex, a two-headed, three-legged bird-like concoction; Fuzzball, a sort of flying-gerbil thing created by Rick Baker; and Hooter, a clumsy elephant creature who constantly farts, or honks, or something.

Top to bottom: Coppola, Angelica Huston, Lucas and Hooter at the premiere; A fully immersed audience; Sketches for Hooter. **Above right:** Jackson with Fuzzball.

With the gang formed, shooting commenced on Stage 9 of Laird Studios (now Culver Studios) in July 1985. Huston abhorred the hours of make-up and prosthetic application she had to endure each morning, and was frustrated when Jackson requested she remain in it for his camera angles. She was often strung up in a harness, in the rafters, booming down to Jackson and his ragtag troupe, her heavy headgear unintentionally flopping into her face.

Jackson himself was still a little on edge after his head and hair had been severely burnt during filming on a Pepsi commercial the previous year. On *EO*, he only had to deal with being accidentally cracked in the face with a whip by one of the performers dressed as the queen's 'whip warriors', and being unintentionally pronged in the throat by a henchwoman. Perhaps mercifully, it was a short shoot — Coppola could only spare two weeks for principal photography because he had to start work on *Peggy Sue Got Married*. Once he'd gone, the crew began to figure out what they had and, more to the point, what they didn't have.

SPEAKING BEFORE A SCREENING

of the first rough cut, which was riddled with temp shots for the in-progress effects work, Lucas warned the crew that it wasn't going to be pretty. "He came in and said, 'I want you all to know that this is gonna make you really upset and depressed and miserable. Because they always do at this stage. You will wanna jump and leave because you'll think it's such a disaster,'" recalls Lemorande. "And we were all thinking, 'Okay, ha ha ha.' But then it played and it was *horrible*. Given what it cost, I thought, 'I will never work again.' What Francis had directed was an elegant, beautiful piece, but this had no pizzazz. It didn't work as a musical, it didn't work narratively. What it took from that point to reach the final product was a massive post-production effort."

ORIGINALLY, ONLY ONE SONG, the centrepiece *We Are Here To Change The World*, was planned, but Lemorande felt the film lacked an ending. Jackson had written a further song for the film, *Another Part Of Me*, which was initially discarded. Lemorande, though, had kept the demo tape in his bag, and decided to use it for an extended climax, making it work with existing coverage. "We already had the footage of the dancers," he says. "If you've got an uptempo song, you can swap out footage and it looks like you shot it for that." That's not to say that you can't tell what's going on. "Well, the dance for *Another Part Of Me* was outtakes from *We Are Here To Change The World*," he says. "If you look at it, they're just kind of prancing around. Nobody's singing."

They did need shots of Jackson singing the new song, so pick-ups were scheduled. Coppola drafted in his editor, Walter Murch, who had just directed *Return To Oz*, to film an extra day with Jackson and work on the editing for a few months. "I never thought I'd be directing Michael Jackson, but there I was," says Murch now. "The only thing he ever asked me was, 'What's my eyeline? Where should I be looking?' I gave him a focus point and off he went."

But there was a problem, says Lemorande, with "the little robot that fit in the back of the big robot". Namely, it had been stolen. "We had to build one really fast to be able to shoot the robots walking off. If you look at the head of that new robot, it's a toilet float. If you lift the tank off a toilet there's a spherical thing that floats – that's what that is. We made it that day out of spare parts. And Michael improvised the dance."

With that improvisation came more problems, particularly concerning one of Jackson's new moves. "There was something he called his 'signature gesture', which was him grabbing his crotch. He would do that quite frequently," says Murch. "Disney did not like this idea. There was a certain amount of pulling back and forth around that." No crotch-grabs survived the edit, although there are some pelvic thrusts.

When Coppola hired him to take over, Murch asked for any pointers when dealing with the pop star. "He said, 'Well, sometimes he doesn't want to come out of his dressing room. If you address him through the door as Michael, he will probably not respond. But if you say, "Captain EO, your ship is ready," that is a very good prompt to get him to come out.' So that's what I did. Went to the room and said, 'Captain EO, your ship is ready.' And he came out of his dressing room in costume, in character."

Later, during a tech mix, Murch pitched down Jackson's voice a little. "He said, 'I love the mix, but what happened to my voice? My voice is too low!'" says Murch. "So we mumbled something about some digital something that had gone wrong, and we put it back to the way it was." Jackson, meanwhile, amused himself in the editing suite by sticking bits of paper reading "Kick Me" to Murch's back. "Which he thought was very funny. But at the same time he was on the telephone outbidding The Beatles for their back catalogue by $30 million."

Meanwhile, the creative team had been thinking about how to bring the film to life in the auditoriums, to fully transform it into a state-of-the-art theme-park attraction. Lemorande was of the 'What would Walt do?' school of thought, and didn't think 3D was enough. He suggested more interactive elements, to play with the performance space and further immerse audiences. He wanted the film's themes to be reflected in the physical experience — and lo, 4D was born. "I said to myself, 'This is Disneyland, we should do something you can't do anywhere [else].'" *Captain EO* already had a set designer, but Lemorande poached John Napier, legendary set designer of London's biggest stage musicals, to be the costume designer. "[So] I could get him involved in the in-theatre effects," he says.

A 3D starfield was to open the show. This, explains Rothschild, involved "putting polarising lenses on the tip of each one of thousands of little teeny fibres poking through perforations in the screen", as well as on the walls and ceiling. His team worked with early laser technology, again using the screen perforations, and physical effects included vapour that jetting out when Captain EO's spaceship crashed.

The film's visual-effects work was shared between Disney and Lucas's ILM; other than a CG shot of the queen's planet, the animation used traditional methods. Meanwhile, thanks to the organic production schedule and that extra song, the 12-minute running time expanded to 17 minutes. That, along with the growing special effects and 4D work, meant the budget ballooned. No figure has been confirmed, but the consensus is that the film cost at least $17 million, making it, at the time, "the most expensive film per minute in the history of motion pictures," says Lemorande.

Nobody had been prepared for the amount of work it would involve. "A few



An almost unrecognisable Anjelica Huston as the Supreme Leader.

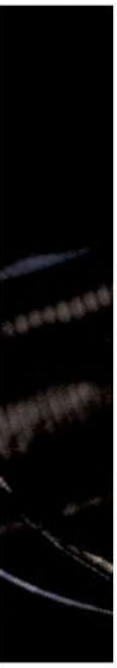


Hooter plays the crew, who have turned into instruments (obviously).



Jackson and pals heal the world with the power of dance and amazing outfits.









Unmade Jackson

SCANDALS PUT AN END TO JACKSON'S CINEMA CAREER BUT, IMMEDIATELY AFTER *CAPTAIN EO*, PRODUCER RUSTY LEMORANDE WAS DEVELOPING TWO AMBITIOUS PROJECTS FOR THE SINGER

7 Faces Of Dr. Lao

"The first idea I came up with was to remake *7 Faces Of Dr. Lao*," reminisces Lemorande. Adapted from Charles G. Finney's 1935 novel (*The Circus Of Dr. Lao*), the 1964 George Pal-directed film starred Tony Randall as a mysterious Chinese man who brings his travelling circus to a small town in the American southwest; Randall played seven mythical characters (including Merlin, The Abominable Snowman, Pan and Medusa) who would entertain the locals while teaching valuable lessons. Lemorande had a hunch it would suit Jackson's unique screen presence. "Michael loved transformations," he says. "It started with *Thriller*. He loved werewolf transformations, he knew about Transformers before anybody I knew, he used to go and buy Japanese toys. *Dr. Lao* was right up Michael's alley, he was thrilled with that idea."

Angels With Dirty Faces

Jackson was a huge James Cagney fan, so Lemorande suggested a remake of 1938's *Angels With Dirty Faces*, a moralising drama about a gangster idolised by a group of kids. The original stars Cagney and Pat O'Brien as childhood friends who take different paths in life: Cagney's Rocky Sullivan turns to crime, O'Brien's Jerry Connolly to God. Towards the end of the film, Jerry pleads with a condemned Rocky to pretend to die a coward, thus showing the neighbourhood kids that there's no glory in crime. "I had a sense that Michael would like the basic theme," says Lemorande, "where an adult could have an impact on young people." He did, and pre-production began at Warner Bros. — then promptly ended with the child abuse allegations against him in 1993. "All this work was just finished. Regardless of whether the accusations were true, they tarnished what he'd built for decades."

days before we opened, George came down for his last review of everything," remembers Rothschild. "I said, 'How's this experience been for you, now that we're pretty much through it?' And he said, 'We had no idea. Francis, myself, none of the people that work for the movie world had any idea what we were getting into. We figured, "Okay, it's a 12-minute movie, one eighth of a regular movie, so it should be about that amount of effort." And when we were all finished, there were more effects than there were in *Star Wars*.'"

ORIGINALLY SLATED TO OPEN

in spring 1986, *Captain EO* was finally unveiled that September. Disneyland hosted a bombastic premiere in Los Angeles. A 90-minute afternoon parade had countless celebrities being driven down Main Street, including Jane Fonda, Charles Bronson, Dolph Lundgren and O. J. Simpson. Huston was accompanied by her then-beau Jack Nicholson. Belinda Carlisle, Robert Palmer and Starship sang; Coppola, Lucas and Huston cut a ceremonial ribbon. Notably absent was EO himself. "Michael Jackson is here," said Eisner, to cheers. "But he is disguised, either as an old lady, an usher, or an animatronic character."

It was a desperate red herring. "He had to say something," says Lemorande. "I felt terribly sorry for him." According to Zack O'Malley Greenburg in his book *Michael Jackson, Inc.*, Jackson had told CBS Records president Walter Yetnikoff that his no-show was because he wanted a tougher persona. "I want a more grown-up image," Jackson said. "I'm not a child anymore, I don't want to be publicised holding hands with Pluto."

His non-appearance, and the negative newspaper reviews, didn't dampen enthusiasm. Disneyland stayed open for 60 hours that weekend to accommodate Jackson's fans, making for a record-breaking $2 million in admission sales. In 1987, *Captain EO* opened in Tokyo Disneyland, and in 1992, Paris. Its success surprised Disney, says Rothschild; they initially thought it might last two or three years.

Then in 1993, the first wave of child abuse allegations against Jackson hit the headlines. A direct connection was never officially cited, but the following year, *EO* left Epcot. By 1998, it had disappeared from all the Disney parks.

Just over a decade later, though, it returned. "I was at Disney World working on *Hall Of Presidents*," says Rothschild. This was 2009. "I was on my computer in the theatre and the newsflash came on that Michael had been rushed to hospital. And then they announced that he'd passed, and almost from that point it was, 'I wonder if we'll think about bringing it back.'"

In December that year, Disney announced *Captain EO*'s return "for an exclusive, limited engagement at Disneyland". Jackson's death had resurrected EO. Some attitudes towards his legacy had softened, and by July 2010 the film had returned to all Disney parks.

Rothschild relished the opportunity to rework the attraction. The film remained the same, but audio advances enabled much better sound quality. Extra air and lighting effects were added, as well as hydraulic seats which shook along with the sound. Once again the show's appeal exceeded expectations, running for years. But it finally fizzled out and, on December 6 last year, it unceremoniously vanished for good.

FOR ALL ITS SUCCESS,

Captain EO has never appeared on a home entertainment format. The only way to see it now is unofficially on YouTube, where it's difficult to judge it in its proper context. Lucas, Coppola and Jackson's collaboration was not so much a film as an event: a bizarre, grandiose theme-park attraction which capitalised on the success of its creators. Back then, Epcot and Tomorrowland were viable visions of the future, and Jackson could do no wrong: indeed, EO was one of his early experiments in offering himself up as a saviour of the world — or, in this case, the universe. Coppola's press spiel about Captain EO being a messiah bringing change to the world was not far off the singer's own perceived reality.

"Michael always wanted to be a saviour," says Jerry Kramer, who produced Jackson's next feature-length film, *Moonwalker*. "Rising above, spreading goodwill and peace with his magical powers. Michael would have liked to have been — dare I say? — a god. A benevolent god." In *The Resistible Demise Of Michael Jackson*, Evan Calder Williams writes that *Captain EO* is "part of the long moment when Michael stops making music to dance to and starts making music to convince us — or perhaps himself — to 'heal the world'."

Today *Captain EO* is a curio, but it remains a freakish delight. Neither folly nor masterpiece, it's a product of the '80s, the decade getting carried away with itself. Gloriously.

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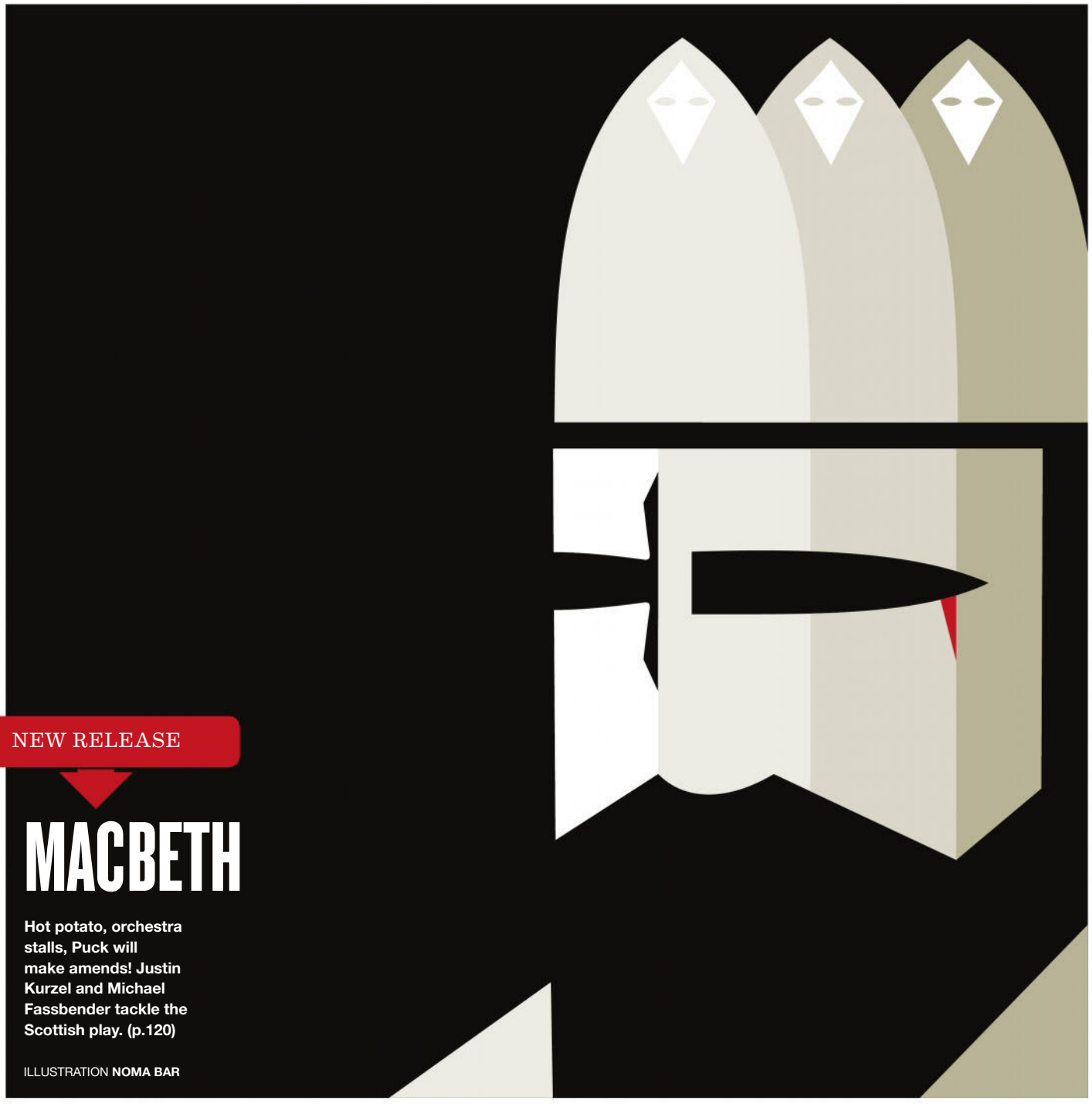
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RE.VIEW



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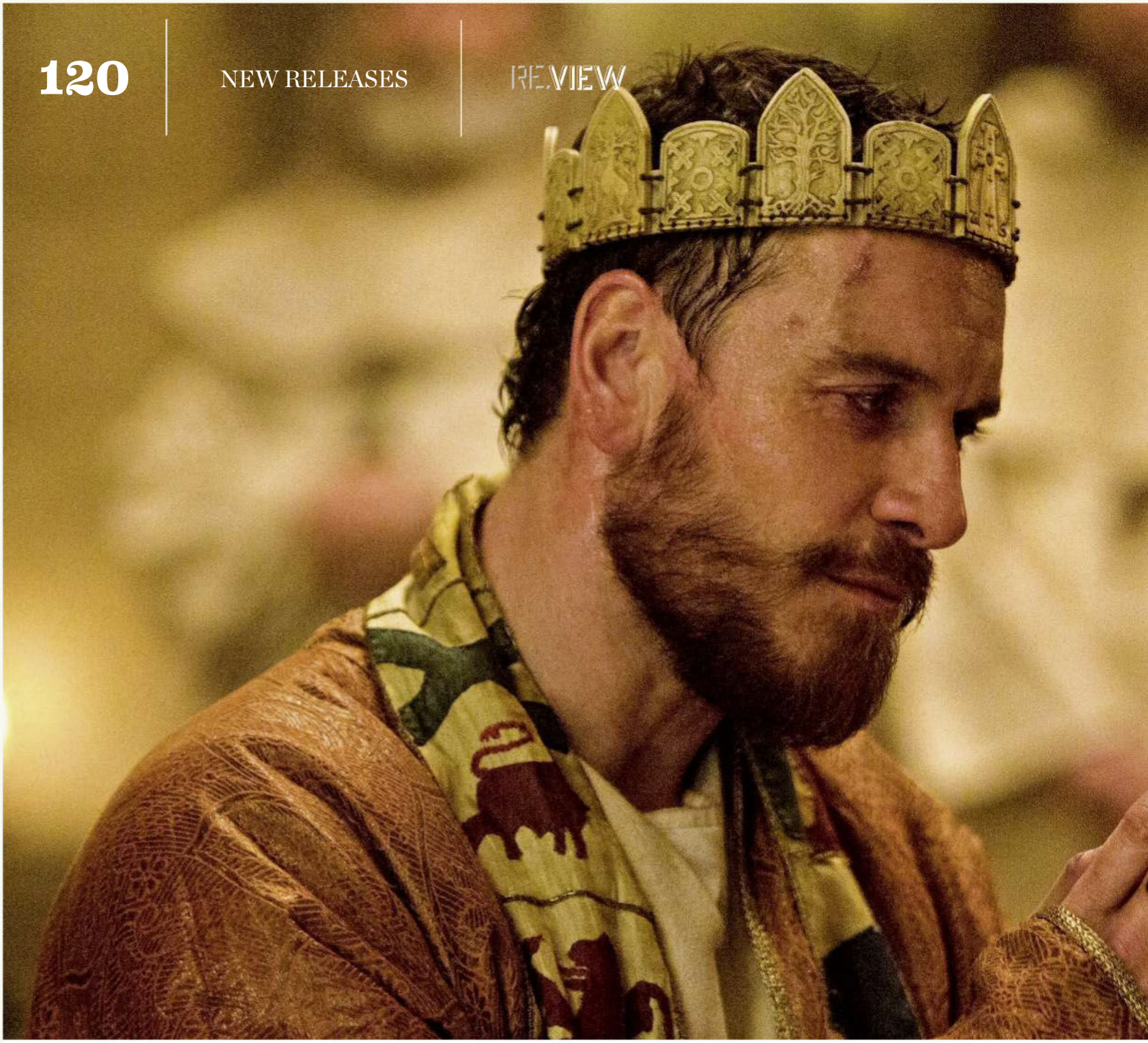
NEW RELEASE

MACBETH

Hot potato, orchestra stalls, Puck will make amends! Justin Kurzel and Michael Fassbender tackle the Scottish play. (p.120)

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Macbeth

★★★★★

FROM **NOW** / CERT. **15**

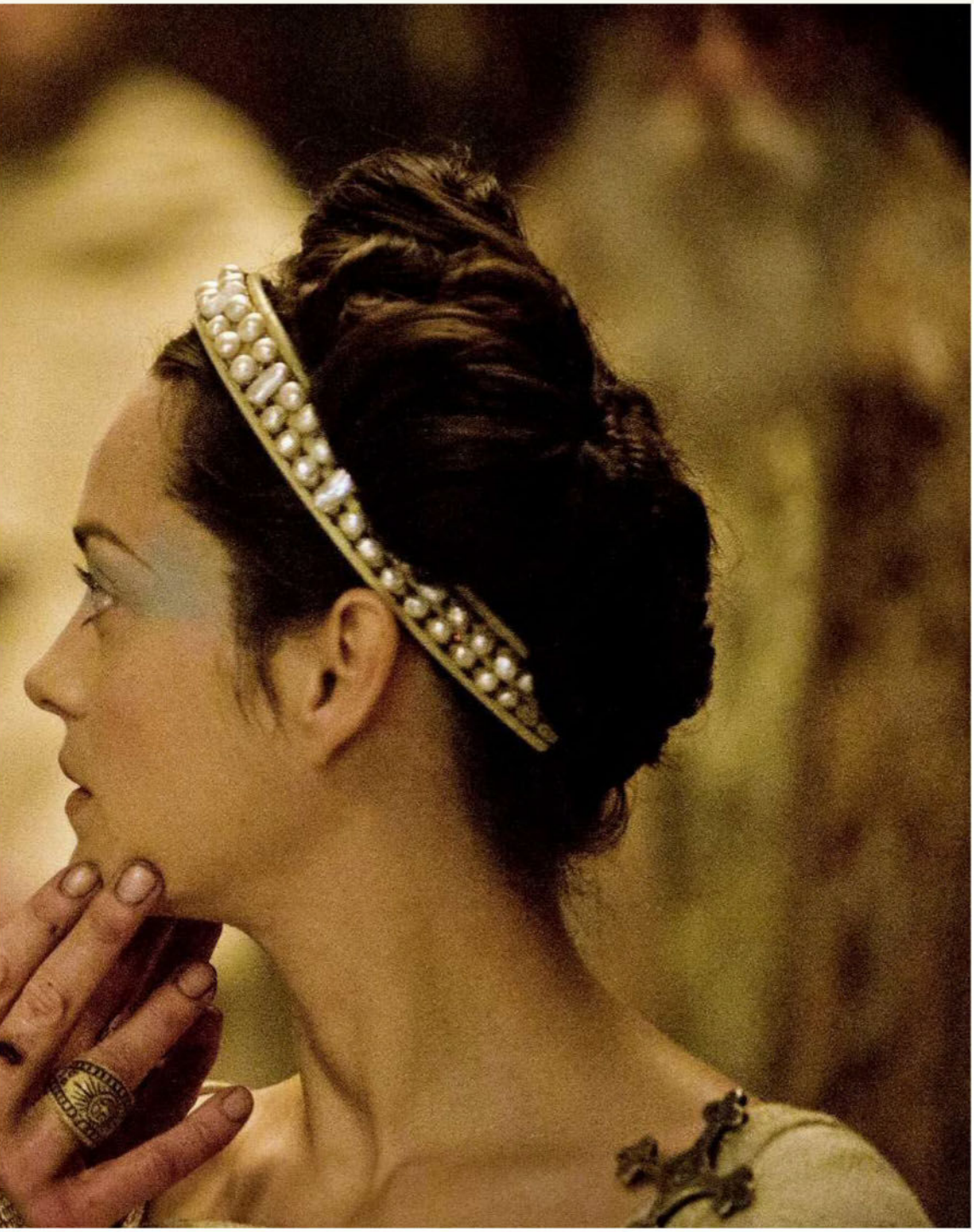
DVD BR

THANE'S WORLD

FROM ORSON Welles to Toshirô Mifune to, presumably, that version in which Baldrick's uncle played 'Second Codpiece', every generation has a *Macbeth* to reflect its times. Michael Fassbender's Thane is perfect for ours: the kind of PTSD-scarred warrior Help For Heroes was created for. The modern resonance is hard to miss in Justin Kurzel's fierce, dreamlike and eerily beautiful take on Shakespeare. A grieving father, broken-down soldier and sufferer of mental trauma, this Macbeth is a monster to whom we can all relate.

Cannily, the opening sidelines the play's three prophetic cauldron-botherers to show Macbeth and Marion Cotillard's Lady Macbeth standing over their child's funeral pyre. This isn't just a *Clan Of Cards*-style political thriller or blood-soaked horror — although both elements play into it — but a human tragedy, we're reminded, about broken-down, misguided souls pursing a reckless course into the mouth of catastrophe. Cotillard's Lady M is much more than just the manipulative, power-hungry cliché that spawned a thousand movie imitators and Cersei Lannister. She's angry rather than spiteful; haunted, like her husband, by ghosts of the past and nursing deep wounds. The French actress is terrific, juggling





the pentameter like an Elizabethan, as the silk glove to her husband's iron fist.

Kurzel provides visual fireworks to complement those interior tensions. The South Australian recently claimed that comedy is his real first love, but until he delivers a romcom, his idea of a meet-cute remains two lots of heavily armed Scotsmen hacking each other to pieces. And, boy, can he pull that off. Forget the *Game Of Thrones* comparisons — the battle scene, shot square-on and with glorious slo-mo, owes more to the cordite-shrouded hallucinations of *Apocalypse Now* or *Come And See*. Where those landscapes are vast and rugged, the royal palace is by turns cavernous and claustrophobic. With Jed Kurzel's (Justin's brother) majestically jarring score and the vivid sound design, following Macbeth's unsteady steps through its churchly chambers is an intensely sensory experience.

The shoot was too, by all accounts, although the rather po-faced bonus features refer to the toils of filming on Scotland's rainy moors only obliquely. There are tales of *The Revenant*-style conditions on set — the superstition of marking 'The Scottish Film' on clapperboards failed to lift the play's curse — but details are disappointingly scarce here. Discretion may be the better part of valour, but one shot of Fassbender being winched out of a bog wouldn't have gone amiss. **PHIL DE SEMLYEN**

Above: Out, damn'd spot! That was quite a pimple she was sporting. **Left:** Macbeth was a big fan of *Braveheart*.

ALSO OUT



The Walk

★★

FROM **NOW** / CERT. **PG** DVD BR

→ An exercise in vertiginous 3D spectacle on release, offering dizzying views from the Twin Towers tightrope walk of French daredevil Philippe Petit (Joseph Gordon Levitt), *The Walk* is less impressive on the smaller screen, where its ploddingness as a procedural and the dislikability of its lead character are all too obvious. **DJ**



Love

★★★

FROM **NOW** / CERT. **18** DVD BR

→ Arthouse provocateur Gaspar Noé aims to shock once again with an all-holes-bared account of sexuality in a relationship between Murphy (Karl Glusman) and, well, every woman on screen. But while he illustrates the central role of sex in our love affairs, he fails to make his characters interesting beyond their bedroom antics. **HOH**



The Program

★★★

FROM **FEBRUARY 8** / CERT. **15** DVD BR

→ Stephen Frears' drama about the rise and fall of cyclist Lance Armstrong is more illuminating than documentary *The Armstrong Lie*, but still can't quite unravel the contradictions that turned a cycling hero into the sport's biggest villain. Ben Foster, in the lead role, is intense and compelling, but we're never quite let inside his twisted head. **HOH**



Crimson Peak

★★★★

FROM **FEBRUARY 22** / CERT. **15**

DVD BR

HOUSE OF HORRORS

THE DEMISE OF Guillermo del Toro's *Crimson Peak* is one of 2015's saddest stories. In a world crying out for original films of a certain scale, here was one that sprang fully formed from the mind of one of the world's greatest directors: beautifully designed, elaborate, wickedly witty, unlike anything we've seen in years. Yet it was rejected wholesale by audiences, making just $74 million.

Part of the problem seems to be that, because del Toro set most of his action in an old, creaking house seemingly gussied up by Satan's interior designer, people thought they were getting a traditional scarefest. Del Toro, though, has never been interested in making a mere horror film (*Mimic*, a truly horrible experience for the director, is the closest he's come). He could, if he wanted, make audiences bounce out of their seats in fear, but as is said early on in the film, *Crimson Peak* isn't a ghost story. It's a story that just happens to have ghosts in it.

Instead, del Toro is more concerned with exploring other, more complex, more perverted areas, as Mia Wasikowska is lured to England by Tom Hiddleston and Jessica Chastain's seemingly well-to-do brother and sister team. Del Toro's always been a relatively restrained filmmaker when it comes to matters below the waist, but he more than makes up for it here. It's not quite *Fifty Shades Of Crimson*, but as Wasikowska's delicate flower is indelicately deflowered, there are handjobs, a thrusting Hiddlebum, and all kinds of things bumping uglies in the night. It's enough to make Hellboy blush.

> "Is this a dagger I see befo-" oh hang on, wrong new release.

Del Toro may root himself in genre more than his Mexican compatriots, Alfonso Cuarón and Alejandro González Iñárritu, but he's no less determined to experiment and push cinema as far as it can go. Here, he uses his astonishing central location, a three-storey set that feels completely immersive, to echo and enhance the emotions of Wasikowska's beleaguered protagonist, his camera constantly gliding through spooky corridors and finding hidden depths in the darkness. Deep reds, blacks and blues abound: if it were an out-and-out horror, it'd be the best-looking one in decades.

If there are flaws in *Crimson Peak*'s foundations, it's in the fairly flimsy story, with twists that arrive by telegram and a central mystery that Sherlock Holmes would solve in his lunch hour. And while Chastain is suitably terrifying as the film's one true monster, she perhaps overdoes it with the eye-bulging evils. Still, it's a rare thing indeed to be in the hands of a master at his — yes! — peak. **CHRIS HEWITT**

ALSO OUT



Pan

★★

FROM **FEBRUARY 8** / CERT. **TBC** DVD BR

→ The struggles of youngsters have loomed large in Joe Wright's work, so it was probably only a matter of time before he shipped them to a slave mine to drone out Nirvana songs to a hammy villain. The director's first major misstep, *Pan* extracts neither the charm of the original yarn nor much magic from Neverland's kaleidoscopic hues. **PDS**



Maze Runner: The Scorch Trials

★★

DVD BR

FROM **NOW** / CERT. **12**

→ Thomas (Dylan O'Brien) and his fellow Gladers bust out of the prison-slash-lab they are held in, only to face the 'Scorch', where death, desert and PG-unfriendly zombies await. O'Brien is incredibly game, but the film's patchy tone and underdeveloped characters make you long to return to the maze. **ET**



Bill

★★★

FROM **FEBRUARY 15** / CERT. **PG** DVD

→ The team behind Horrible Histories delivered with hopefully the first in a long line of Funny Films, this one focusing on Shakespeare (Matthew Baynton) getting drawn into a plot to kill Elizabeth I. While it's a little uneven, it's hard to argue with the delightful puns ("Just a salad that needs addressing") and Ben Willbond's zesty turn as Phillip II. **NDS**



Sicario

★★★★★

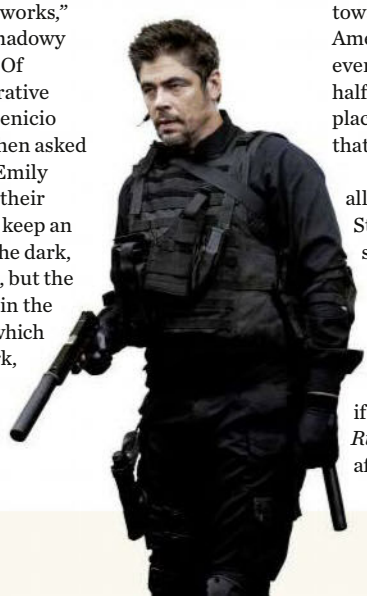
FROM **JANUARY 31** / CERT. **15**

DVD BR

Above: Emily Blunt has a bad feeling about this. **Below:** Benicio Del Toro lives up to the title.

HITMEN AND HER

"YOU'RE ASKING ME how a watch works," stonewalls shadowy Department Of Defense operative Alejandro (Benicio Del Toro), when asked by new colleague Kate Macer (Emily Blunt) for a big-picture view of their current mission. "For now, just keep an eye on the time." She's kept in the dark, right until the nightmarish end, but the thrill of narco-drama *Sicario* is in the positively Swiss precision with which the pieces fit. Story, camerawork, score, performances: all come together to create something uniquely, fist-clenchingly intense.



The film's 'making of' docs reveal the depth of thought that went into it. In one, ace cinematographer Roger Deakins (who was inspired by photographer Alex Webb) explains how a SWAT car in an early scene was specially designed to allow a beam of light to swing past Kate's face. Meanwhile, the movie's bravura central set-piece, in which a convoy of black Chevy Tahoes snakes through lawless Juárez ('The Beast'), bearing the government agents towards an ambush on the Bridge Of The Americas, is laboriously storyboarded, every panicky facial twitch and half-glimpse of the enemy exactly placed. The result is an action movie that feels not just epic, but mythic.

It's a tough watch: Kate isn't even allowed the catharsis granted Clarice Starling in *The Silence Of The Lambs*, seemingly one of *Sicario*'s inspirations. But bleak as it is, this is the kind of complex, haunting, grown-up movie Hollywood needs to make more of. And it showcases the full extent of director Denis Villeneuve's powers; if you weren't excited for his *Blade Runner* sequel before, you will be after this. **NICK DE SEMLYEN**



TRUE DETECTIVE: SEASON 2

★★

FROM **NOW** / CERT. **18**

DVD BR

COP OUT

"IT'S BEEN A YEAR of goodbyes," said Andy Samberg at the 2015 Emmys. "We said goodbye to *Mad Men* and *Parks And Recreation*. And we also said goodbye to *True Detective*, even though it's still on the air..."

A year earlier, such a diss would have been unthinkable. With the first season, novelist-turned-showrunner Nic Pizzolatto was declared an impressive new voice for this golden age of US TV drama. Balmy and eerie, his Louisiana-set murder mystery thrilled us with its character interplay, genre subversion and fluid action scenes, and throbbed with an almost supernatural sense that, in the darkness that swirls beneath this layer of dirt we call reality, demons lurk.

The advantage Pizzolatto had in 2014 was to arrive virtually unheralded, blessed with an A-list double act in Woody Harrelson and Matthew McConaughey, the latter on the cusp of his Oscar win. He also owed a great deal to Cary Fukunaga, who directed every episode of what was, effectively, a coherent and powerful stand-alone miniseries.

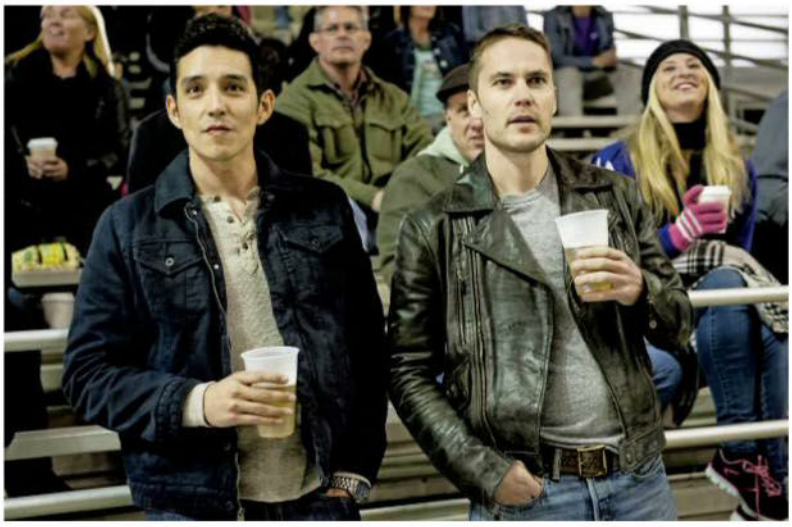
Perhaps it *should* have been a stand-alone miniseries, for Season 2 arrived last summer laden with more expectation than it could bear. Speculation about who the new detectives might be turned into bemusement when Pizzolatto settled on Taylor Kitsch (John Carter?) and Vince Vaughn (Wes Mantooth?!). There were assurances that, despite a fresh locale (California), it would be set in the same world as the first season. But, beyond another amazing soundtrack from T Bone Burnett and some broad structural similarities, it

Above: Vince Vaughn and Colin Farrell have a gloom-off. **Below:** Rachel McAdams as Ani.









Top: Kelly Reilly as Frank's wife, Jordan. Above: Taylor Kitsch (right) as Woodrugh, alongside Gabriel Luna's Miguel.

has little in the way of real connective tissue. Plus, crucially, Fukunaga chose not to return for Season 2.

Even if you try to forget the looming shadow of its predecessor, this is a bumpy ride. Kitsch is impressive as the traffic cop who discovers the corpse and sets the plot in motion, and the central pairing of Colin Farrell and Rachel McAdams is compelling. But any time the action flicks to Vaughn as Frank, the going-straight gangster forced to go crooked again, things lurch into borderline parody. It's not just that Vaughn's acting muscles seem locked into comedy; Pizzolatto lumbers him with excruciating dialogue ("Never do anything out of hunger. Even eating").

For every highlight, there is a blunder. So while Episode 4's climactic shootout is one of the most exciting televisual moments of last year, we also get Frank's daft metaphysical stumble through the desert, or Ray's (Farrell) Airfix-smashing meltdown.

Season 2 also lacks the narrative crispness and originality for which Pizzolatto was so praised the first time around. It's interesting that he seems reluctant to explain his murky plotting, or say much at all, on the two episode commentaries (for four and eight) included on these discs. It would seem he's embraced the mind-spinning plot complexities of classic noirs like *The Big Sleep* or the works of James Ellroy. And therein lies the core problem with *True Detective* Season 2: it's not so much that it's eclipsed by the first season, more that it's overly reliant on genre conventions. From its familiar, West Coast setting to its heavily Ellroy-esque touches (the corpse with its eyes burned out by acid) to its serving up of crime-genre archetypes (the bent cop seeking redemption, the mobbed-up mayor), it just doesn't feel, well, *true*. **DAN JOLIN**

ALSO OUT



Sherlock: The Abominable Bride

★★★

FROM **NOW** / CERT. **15** DVD BR

→ The first half of this 90-minute Christmas special is a rollicking ride, setting Victorian versions of Holmes and Watson on the trail of a wedding-veiled ghoul. Then it all goes a bit *Inception*, upending the cute conceit with a big tricksy twist. The result is ambitious but uneven. **NDS**



Luther: Series 4

★★★

FROM **NOW** / CERT. **15** DVD BR

→ Idris Elba's tweedy copper is back, this time dealing with a cannibal, an east London gangster and a psychic. The elements are all there (maverick tactics, LOTS OF SHOUTING!) and Elba's on fine form, but this two-parter isn't *Luther* at its best, with the absence of Ruth Wilson's sociopath Alice Morgan painfully felt. **JD**



Girls: Season 4

★★★

FROM **NOW** / CERT. **18** DVD BR

→ If you're hoping for redemption in Season 4, you'll be disappointed. But Christ, that'd be boring. What you *do* get is Shoshanna, Hannah, Marnie and Jessa edging towards their own character arcs for the first time. The standout performance, however, is from Gaby Hoffman as Caroline. Every line she spits is glorious. **TW**



The Martian

★★★★

FROM **NOW** / CERT. **12**

DVD BR

A SINGLE MAN

THOUGH HIS career was never in any danger — there are few directors with more projects simmering away — in recent years Ridley Scott's movies had lost some thrill. He's always made beautiful films, but the stories became more convoluted. Scott is at his best with an idea that can be summarised in a couple of sentences, giving him room to build a world around it; *The Martian*, which boils down to "man left for dead on Mars isn't dead", led to his best film since *Gladiator*.

With *The Martian*, the director of *Alien* and *Blade Runner* is still working with science fiction, but it's based in science fact. The story of Mark Watney (Matt Damon) takes place in space, but it's a world of real scientific problems, not aliens and made-up technology. It makes a thriller out of people being smart, rather than fearless. Damon, who spends much of the film alone, makes a tricky role look simple, layering Watney's smartassery over a core of very real terror.

As Scott says on the extras, which amount to a collection of production featurettes and a (not very funny) gag reel, the backbone of the story is the impossibility of the task. Even if you can see where this rescue mission might be going, that's not the point. The point is seeing how people take on the impossible to save one man. It's a movie full of danger, but it's also one of the most hopeful, upbeat films of the year. Ridley Scott's futures are no longer all dystopian. **OLLY RICHARDS**

EMPIRE VIEWING GUIDE

EMPIRE SPOILER ALERT!

WORDS **OLLY RICHARDS**

THE BEST MOMENTS FROM RIDLEY SCOTT'S COSMIC CASTAWAY THRILLER



02.13

Mission To Mars

The film begins with the crew of the Hermes already on Mars, conducting a research trip. Screenwriter Drew Goddard originally had another beginning in mind. "In the original script, and actually what we shot, was to start with Mark Watney (*Matt Damon*) waking up. The accident was in the middle of the movie," he says. "But then when we cut two versions, I saw [the final version] and I said to Ridley, 'I was fully prepared to hate the change, but the movie needs to rocket into it.' We didn't need the mystery."



03.34

The Storm

The book's author, Andy Weir, aimed for scientific accuracy as much as possible, but happily admitted that the storm that strands Watney couldn't happen on Mars, due to atmospheric sciencey reasons. Goddard kept it anyway. "Our job was to make a great movie," he says. "The science is crucial to that, don't get me wrong, but if it just became a science paper, nobody was going to go see it."



15.49

Monologuing

"This was the single most challenging thing for a screenwriter," says Goddard of Watney's video-logs. "[In the novel] you were essentially reading diary entries from a person who has nobody to talk to. But that's what was exciting to me... It made me realise how much more visual the screenplay had to be."

35.03

"Science The Shit Out Of It"

"One of the fun things about being a screenwriter is you're never sure what's going to connect," says Goddard. "'I'm going to have to science the shit out of it' was just a throwaway line I wrote one day that made me laugh. I didn't think anything of it, but I love that it's caught on. Now that I step back, I can see it does sort of encapsulate the movie."



58.26

Good News, Bad News

Goddard beefed up the role of Commander Melissa Lewis (*Jessica Chastain*) to give the film a through-line. "When the crew find out he's alive, you have to see that joy, and then the realisation that she's left him for dead... I can't put that in dialogue, that's all Jessica Chastain."



01:02:39

BANG!

Watney finds a way to grow potatoes on Mars and all seems to be going reasonably well, until his home base, the HAB, explodes. Goddard had to rejig the sequence. "In the book there's this lovely moment where Mark's stuck in the air-lock and can't find where the leak is, so he cuts his own hair and burns it to follow the smoke. I loved it, but it's really hard to shoot. So Ridley came up with the idea of his helmet breaking and him taping it up, which I think plays really well on screen."

01:06:34

Watney Breaks

The usually chipper Watney finally cracks after the loss of his potato crop. It's one of the few times we see him lose it. "We all felt that you want to save the big outburst moments," explains Goddard. "If you fill the movie with them then they lose their power. It's much more about the silences... You feel his fear."

01:22:57

The Council Of Elrond

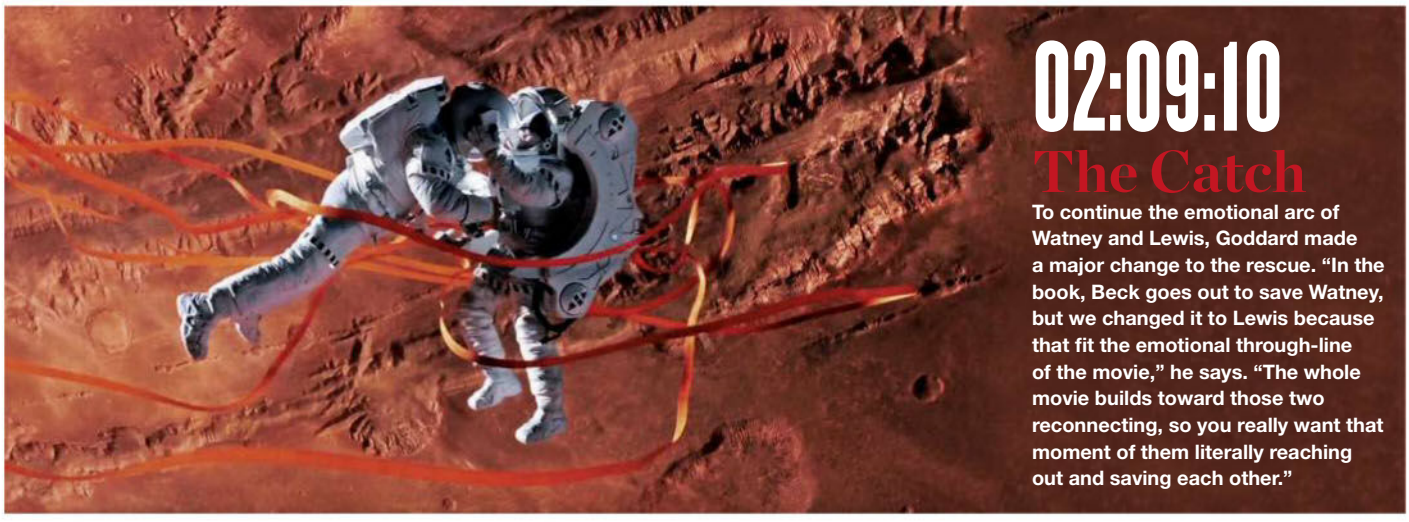
When the top NASA boffins meet to plan Mark's rescue, they code-name the meeting Elrond, in a reference to *The Lord Of The Rings*. *Rings* star Sean Bean is in the meeting. "That's in the book!" says Goddard. "It wasn't until well after Sean Bean was cast that we thought, 'Oh man, do we need to change that?' It's one of my favourite parts because Sean doesn't ham it up. He's not winking at the camera, but it's still funny and it delights me."



01:57:52

The Rescue Attempt

"We had to make Mark more active in the rescue than in the book," says Goddard. "So much of the movie is about him being active in trying to save himself that it would be weird for him not to be at the end. I think Andy Weir chose to [make him less active] because that would be scientifically pretty shaky, but the right thing for the movie was to have Mark be more active."



02:09:10

The Catch

To continue the emotional arc of Watney and Lewis, Goddard made a major change to the rescue. "In the book, Beck goes out to save Watney, but we changed it to Lewis because that fit the emotional through-line of the movie," he says. "The whole movie builds toward those two reconnecting, so you really want that moment of them literally reaching out and saving each other."



Kim Newman's MOVIE DUNGEON

PLAGUES, PIXIES AND POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS

ILLUSTRATION **JOHN ROYLE**

LONG-SERVING dungeoneers will appreciate the deft shuffle-work of A. B. Stone's *Lake Placid Vs Anaconda*, which entwines aspects of *eight* previous critter franchises. The evil company from *Anacondas: The Hunt For The Blood Orchid* visits Lake Placid in order to crossbreed giant crocodiles and snakes to develop an immortality serum. Naturally, the killer reptiles get loose to snack on the bikini-clad girls nearby. Croc-hunters Yancy Butler and Robert Englund stick around from *Lake Placid* sequels, Stephen Billington replaces The Hoff (who made *Sharknado 3: Oh Hell No!* instead, the fool!) as a snake-tracking merc, and newcomer Corin Nemec is a game warden at odds with the crocaconda experiments. It's obviously not over yet.

It's odd that the *Leprechaun* films haven't crossbred — *Leprechaun Vs Wishmaster* would be a natural — but it's been rebooted (albeit without Warwick Davis). In *Leprechaun Origins*, tourists are lured into harm's way to appease a root-encrusted wood demon. It's so authentically Irish the villain is called Hamish and so original the doomed kids wind up besieged in a cabin in the woods.

Contracted: Phase II is a step in the evolution of a possible new franchise, as the semi-supernatural plague is passed on to a fresh victim (Matt Mercer), who turns into a zombie-vampire-demon hybrid. Hint — people with "Abaddon" tattooed on them are not to be trusted.

Benjamin R. Moody's mumblegore opus *Last Girl Standing* isn't a sequel, but opens like a follow-up to a generic 1980s slasher. Teenager Akasha Banks Villalobos defeats a maniac who murdered all her friends... then the story picks up years later with her suffering post-traumatic stress, barely holding down a job or a relationship. Then she becomes convinced her stalker is back. An edgy, indie character drama, it refers to slashers rather than going full horror, so when the killings restart there's a melancholy, tragic undertone.

Iain Carson's *RZ-9*, an achingly sincere political science-fiction movie with a covert religious message, tackles big issues by having folks yomp across a wilderness with guns, dodging drones and brooding on injustice. When LA is nuked by a non-specific terrorist, the government outsources oppressive secret policing to private enterprise. A drone pilot (Joshua Marble) due to be busted for suspicious religious activities joins the rebels and is pursued by an anti-religious fanatic (Ethan McDowell). There are scrappy shoot-outs and self-sacrificing gestures, but it all ends with the gunman and his crazy boss (Michael Gier) arguing things out. As a projected future dystopia, *The Purge* is slightly less unbelievable and a whole lot more exciting.

"DON'T YOU WORRY ABOUT ME. IF THERE'S ONE THING I'M GOOD AT IT'S STOPPING CROCODILES."
LAKE PLACID VS ANACONDA



PICKS OF THE MONTH

The Otto Preminger Film Noir Collection



→ This Blu-ray set features neurotic tough guys in battered hats, glamorously imperilled dames, hard-boiled dialogue and seductive black-and-white cityscapes. *Fallen Angel* has Dana Andrews as a con man who turns detective; *Whirlpool* offers José Ferrer as an evil hypnotist ensnaring klepto Gene Tierney in a murder plot; *Where The Sidewalk Ends* brings back Andrews as a thug cop getting deep in trouble when he roughs up a suspect who dies on him.

An Englishman's Castle



→ In the mood for another Nazis-won-the-war miniseries with the word "castle" in the title? Look no further than *An Englishman's Castle* (1978), a three-part BBC drama set in an alternative world where a TV writer is politely pressured to play down anti-German sentiments in a popular soap opera. Scenarist Philip Mackie embeds a standard self-pitying middle-aged bloke (wonderfully underplayed by Kenneth More) into an icily cosy dystopia. The understated finish is suitably stirring.

Creep



→ A two-hander from Patrick Brice and Mark Duplass, *Creep* is a funny, unnerving found-footage film. Cameraman Aaron (Brice) is hired to make a video testament that supposedly terminally ill client Josef (Duplass) intends for his unborn son. Josef gets flirty, stalkery and abusive — sometimes putting on a werewolf mask and assuming an alternative identity as 'Peachfuzz', who has his own theme tune — as Aaron is pulled into weird gameplay for a long, unsettling night.

• ILLUSTRATION: PETER STRAIN (KIM PORTRAIT)


THE
EMPIRE
FILM PODCAST
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Empire Podcast.
THE EMPIRE PODCAST WAS VOTED ONE OF APPLE'S BEST PODCASTS OF 2014. TO FIND OUT WHY, VISIT EMPIREONLINE.COM/PODCAST EVERY FRIDAY FOR THE LATEST NEWS, REVIEWS AND — YES! — BIG-NAME INTERVIEWS.
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THE WEEKEND STARTS HERE

WATCH 2016'S BEST HOME ENTS RELEASES WITH #MOVIEWEEKENDER

DRY JANUARY IS becoming a bore and it's cold and miserable outside, which means that this season, staying in is the new going out. What better way to enjoy the great indoors than curling up with some of the fantastic movies coming out on Blu-ray, DVD and Digital HD? From the riveting *Sicario* to the epic *The Martian* to the blistering *Straight Outta Compton*, there are numerous reasons to enjoy some quality sofa and screen time! Once you've made your selections (**findanyfilm.com** can help), share your passions using the hashtag #MovieWeekender. To aid your choice, here are some of our favourites...



Matt Damon finds himself stranded on the red planet.

The Martian

It was billed as Robinson Crusoe in space, but Ridley Scott's sci-fi epic does so much more. Drew Goddard's smart script flips between astro-botanist Mark Watney (Matt Damon), stranded but surviving on Mars, and NASA's valiant attempts to bring him home, delivering suspense and thrills leavened by a very welcome strand of offbeat humour. You can't imagine *Gravity* cutting a rug to '70s disco floor-fillers the way *The Martian* does.

Damon is terrific, while he has A-list support from the likes of Jessica Chastain and Kristen Wiig. But the MVP is Scott, crafting stunning visuals, nail-biting drama and a lightness of touch that he hasn't displayed in yonks. The result is his best film since *Gladiator*.

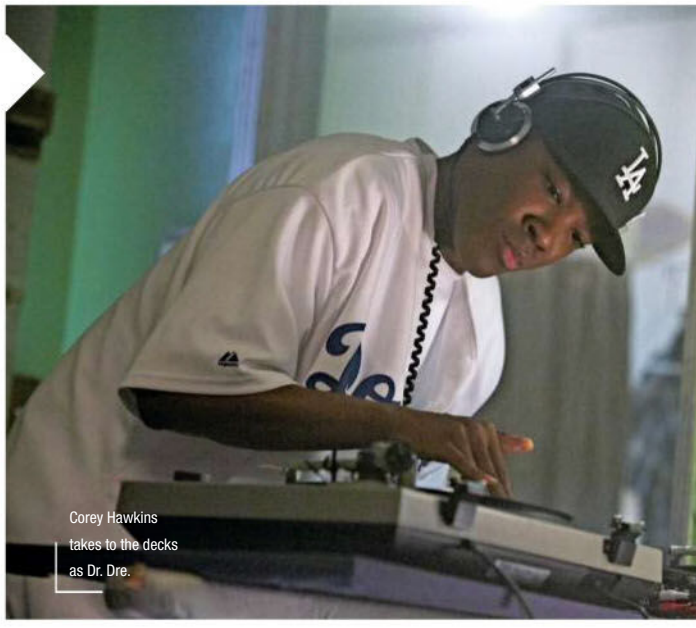
Out on Digital HD now. Out on DVD and Blu-ray on February 8.

Straight Outta Compton

If N.W.A didn't actually invent rap, they coloured in the blueprints. F. Gary Gray's film charts the story of five LA teens — Dr. Dre, Ice Cube, Eazy-E, DJ Yella and MC Ren — who redefined a genre, capturing the anger in the art form that threw a bomb into white Middle America.

Perfectly played by an unknown cast — including Cube's dead-spit son, the excellent O'Shea Jackson — it catches the energy of their live gigs on the way up but doesn't shy away from the machinations of manager Jerry Heller (Paul Giamatti) that led to their downfall. Visually strong, very timely (think Ferguson), even if you don't like rap, the power and passion in the story will draw you in.

Out on DVD and Blu-ray now.



Corey Hawkins takes to the decks as Dr. Dre.



Emily Blunt doesn't know who to trust.

Sicario

Sicario — Spanish for 'hitman' — is a deep, dark exhilarating dive into the War On Drugs. Following a white knuckle raid on a house, Emily Blunt's idealistic Fed is pulled into an elite government task force (by Josh Brolin) to investigate drug lords on the US-Mexican border.

If it sounds like a routine narc thriller, it isn't. *Sicario* is full of stunning imagery, packed with intrigue and is further elevated by a clutch of great performances. Benicio Del Toro is electrifying as the mysterious Alejandro but this is Blunt's movie, excellent as a woman trying to follow her own moral compass in a murky world. A rare film that unites brilliant action with incisive intelligence.

Out on Digital HD, DVD and Blu-ray now.

Everest

A throwback to the disaster movies of the '70s but with more class and restraint, *Everest* is a vivid dramatisation of a disastrous 1996 assault on the world's tallest mountain. Two rival teams of amateur climbers race to the top, sparking stunning vistas, freezing conditions and the guessing game of who will survive or perish. Jason Clarke's likable expedition leader? Josh Brolin's Texan millionaire? Jake Gyllenhaal's surfer-dude climber? You might be surprised.

Away from the whipping winds, the emotional heft is carried by Robin Wright and Keira Knightley as left-behind wives plus Emily Watson as base-camp co-ordinator, but Baltasar Kormákur's film is at its best as an immersive experience. It makes you feel every one of those 29,029 feet.

Out on DVD, Blu-ray and Blu-ray 3D now.



Jake Gyllenhaal wishes he'd gone to the Caribbean.

Legend

Sandwiched between *Mad Max: Fury Road* and *The Revenant*, *Legend* is proof that 2015 was the International Year Of Tom Hardy. One actor playing both Kray twins (below) sounds like a gimmick, but Hardy nails the pair who ruled '60s gangland London with an iron stamp.

On one level it is *GoodGeezers*, marked by swirling cameras, ultraviolence and an intoxicating view of the gangster high-life, but it doesn't skimp on a particularly British kind of tawdriness. Emily Browning adds different dimensions as the gal who catches Reggie's eye but this is Hardy's manor, snarling and swaggering into the best performance of his career.

Out on Digital HD, DVD and Blu-ray now.

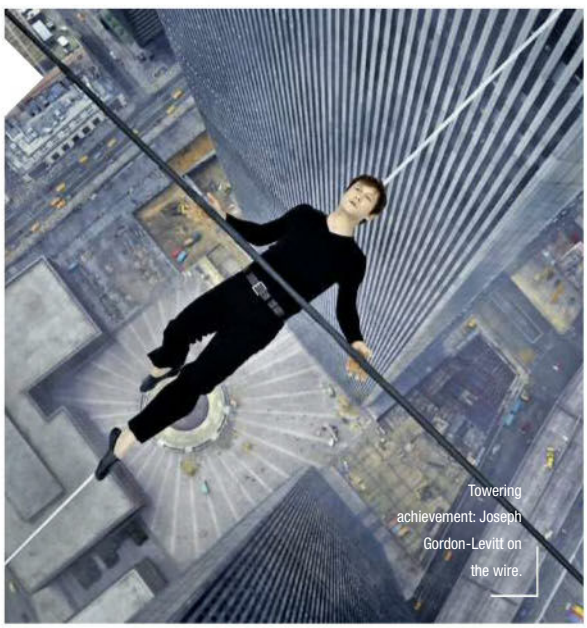
The Walk

Robert Zemeckis' retelling of Philippe Petit's 1974 high-wire walk between the World Trade Center's Twin Towers is actually three films in one.

It starts as a zippy *Nouvelle Vague* comedy as circus performer Petit (Joseph Gordon-Levitt on impish form) gets bitten by the high-wire bug and decides to make that terrifying trip. It turns into a daring heist movie as Petit pulls together a gang of accomplices and meticulously plans the artistic coup of century. Then, in its final act, it becomes a jaw-dropping spectacle as Zemeckis superbly mounts the walk amongst the clouds set-piece, designed to induce maximum vertigo.

A love letter to Manhattan's iconic landmarks and the art of dreaming big.

Out on Digital HD now. Out on DVD, Blu-ray and Blu-ray 3D on February 1.



Towering achievement: Joseph Gordon-Levitt on the wire.



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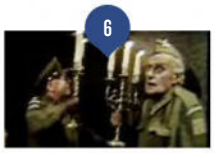
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THE CRIB SHEET

DAD'S ARMY

WITH OLIVER PARKER'S REBOOT OUT ON FEBRUARY 5, A RECAP OF THE BBC'S BELOVED SITCOM NICK DE SEMLYEN

SEASON GUIDE	ESSENTIAL EPISODE	ACTION SEQUENCE	ANY SIGN OF NAZIS?	"DON'T PANIC!" COUNT	CLASSIC QUOTE
 1 & 2*	The pilot, *The Man And The Hour*, in which pompous bank manager-turned-pompous army captain Mainwaring (Arthur Lowe) enlists his inept platoon.	Operation Gun Grab sees the gang storm Walmington-On-Sea's museum, in a milk float.	The unit captures two Luftwaffe airmen, who promptly escape before being recaptured by a visiting officer.	A mere three.	"I can't come now, Mum. I'm blowing up a tank."
 3	*Room At The Bottom*, in which Mainwaring is temporarily demoted to private, prompting hitherto unprecedented levels of apoplexy.	Mainwaring hangs off a runaway blimp, doing a Tarzan yell as he swings through a laundry line.	A German plane crash-lands in a reservoir. Jones (Clive Dunn) accidentally reports it to a cinema.	An impressive 32.	"This is war, Wilson — not Sainsbury's!"
 4	The *Brief Encounter*-riffing *Mum's Army* sees ladies join up. Hilarious, as Mainwaring flirts with a married woman, less so as she leaves him at a station.	Frazer (John Laurie) and Jones don disguises to storm a windmill. Jones ends up stuck on one of the mill's sails and flung into a river.	No, but there are Italian POWS and, in an episode unrepeated on TV until 2012, a scrape with the IRA.	A disappointing nine.	"Is anybody there? If you're not there, say so."
 5	*A Soldier's Farewell*, in which Mainwaring eats too much cheese and dreams he's Napoleon.	Jones falls inside a threshing machine. His trousers are torn off and he has to borrow a pair from a scarecrow.	One, who lands on the clock tower. Attempts to retrieve him result in many squashed hats and a sore bottom for Jones.	A healthy 24.	"In the name of the King, I demand to examine your chicken."
 6	*Things That Go Bump In The Night*, which starts as a haunted-house chiller and ends with Pike (Ian Lavender) naked except for a helmet. Don't ask.	The troops set off to greet the king and must stop a runaway train. Like *Unstoppable*, but with more jokes about upside-down cake.	Yes! Eight of them, an entire U-boat crew, one of whom puts a bomb down Jones' trousers.	A moderate 21.	"Don't tell him your name, Pike!"
 7	*The Godiva Affair* gives the never-seen but clearly awful Mrs. Mainwaring her biggest moment, as she dons 'fleshings' to play Mrs. Godiva in a carnival.	A gorilla chases them around the countryside during a training exercise. Sadly, it turns out to be a spy in disguise.	Not a one, though a kiss-crazy Frenchman does turn up.	A meagre seven.	"I can't help feeling sometimes like I'm in charge of a bunch of idiots."
 8	In *Ring Dem Bells*, the gang are mistaken for baddies when they don Nazi uniforms for a training film, triggering an invasion alert.	Our heroes commandeer a Boy Scouts pirate ship (and bow and arrow) to capture three Germans in a rubber dinghy.	Yes, and in a series first they fire their guns. Boo!	Just one.	"This is war, Godfrey. It's either the hedgehogs or us."
 9	The moving finale, *Never Too Old*, as Jones get married and the troop break the fourth wall, looking into the camera and saluting the real Home Guard.	Jones tries to retrieve an unexploded bomb jammed in telephone wires. He drops it, but fortunately it lands in a vat of porridge.	Not a one, though the platoon do pretend to be fifth columnists. Pike gets confused and dresses up as Al Capone.	A robust six.	"Sir, I don't think I'd like to roam the countryside ravishing maidens."

* ALL BUT THREE EPISODES OF SERIES 2 HAVE BEEN LOST.

MORE OF THIS MONTH'S NEW RELEASES

Also out



A Walk In The Woods

★★★

FROM **FEBRUARY 8** / CERT. **15** DVD BR

→ Robert Redford is travel writer Bill Bryson, Nick Nolte his human-wreck buddy Stephen Katz. As they backpack down the Appalachian Trail getting into mishaps, the film proves to be two John Candy movies (*Planes, Trains And Automobiles*; *The Great Outdoors*) smashed together. It's profoundly formulaic and perfunctorily directed, but the stars give it charm. **NDS**



Air

★★

FROM **NOW** / CERT. **12** DVD

→ Inspired by deep-space thrillers but locating its action underground, *Air* finds two engineers (Norman Reedus, Djimon Hounsou) protecting humanity's assets in a post-apocalyptic bunker. Video-game scribe Christian Cantamessa's moody debut has a pleasingly retro flavour, but a dearth of original ideas renders the film as stultifying as its airless environs. **ES**



The Smuggler

★★★★

FROM **FEBRUARY 22** / CERT. **TBC** DVD

→ On the one hand, this is a film about waiting ages for a man to have a poo. On the other, it's an ace Antipodean heist movie, set against the backdrop of the 1983 America's Cup, which tells the story of hapless drug mule Ray Jenkins (the excellent Angus Sampson). Whichever way you view it, it's a film that deserves your time. **JM**



Love & Mercy

★★★★

FROM **NOW** / CERT. **12** DVD BR

→ Bill Pohlad's biopic of the Beach Boys' Brian Wilson bypasses genre byelaws to paint a moving picture of two very different halves of the same man. Paul Dano is mesmerising as the younger Wilson, slowly succumbing to drugs and insanity, while John Cusack, as the older Brian trying to hold it all together, is more fragile than he's been in years. **CH**



Life

★★★★

FROM **FEBRUARY 1** / CERT. **15** DVD BR

→ Photographer Dennis Stock (Robert Pattinson) desperately tries to bag a shoot with new star on the block James Dean (Dane DeHaan). DeHaan adopts the awkward magnetism and oversized coats with ease, but those expecting a tale of the Hollywood high life will be disappointed: this is a poignant, if drama-light, snapshot of a man on the cusp of fame. **ET**

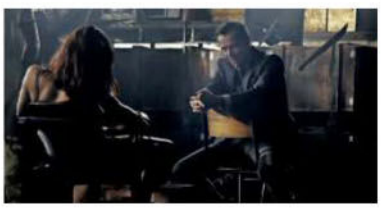


The Lobster

★★★★

FROM **FEBRUARY 8** / CERT. **15** DVD BR

→ In a world where it's a crime to be single, David (Colin Farrell) must find a mate in 45 days or be turned into an animal. Farrell is the heart of this funny, pitch-black, absurdist fairy tale, but it's director Yorgos Lanthimos who deserves most credit. Although, however much horror he piles on, his nightmare scenario still seems less painful than Tinder. **HOH**



Momentum

★

FROM **NOW** / CERT. **15** DVD BR

→ Wildly disproving its title, *Momentum* earned a grand total of £46 in its opening weekend at the UK box office. Kudos, then, to the British public's taste: this is a bland, tedious and thoroughly unpleasant heist 'thriller'. A momentously bad B movie with sheepish-looking A-list stars, Morgan Freeman looks particularly embarrassed to be there. **JN**



Gemma Bovery

★★★

FROM **FEBRUARY 8** / CERT. **15** DVD BR

→ The very definition of whimsy, right up until its surprisingly bitter end, Anne Fontaine's latest sees Gemma Arterton scandalising a French village, sending Fabrice Luchini's eyebrows into overdrive. Adapted from Posy Simmonds' Flaubert-inspired graphic novel, it's irresistibly silly and full of zing: what it lacks in substance it makes up for in *joie de vivre*. **ES**



Irrational Man

★★★

FROM **NOW** / CERT. **12** DVD

→ Woody Allen's latest is a typically wry concoction. As a depressive philosophy professor who finds meaning through murder, Joaquin Phoenix makes for an unconventional Woody surrogate; Emma Stone and Parker Posey offer gallant support. The uneasy blend of romantic intellectualism and violent thrills isn't premium Woody, but offers a lot to like. **JN**

ADVENTURES IN STREAMING

EACH ISSUE, OUR INTREPID WRITER FOLLOWS NETFLIX'S COMPUTER-CALIBRATED RECOMMENDATIONS, GOING WHEREVER THE TRAIL LEADS

WORDS **SIMON CROOK**



Natural Disasters



CALAMITY AS COMFORT-viewing. There's something wrongly reassuring about disaster movies. Be it whirring tornado or burping volcano, the unwreckable formula rarely changes: vast casts, multiple storylines, countdown structure, heroic escapes, blubbery sacrifices and, in a peculiar genre quirk, dogs getting rescued.

First up, one of the daddies of doomsday cinema: ***When Worlds Collide***. Rudolph Maté's epic is a beta-test for disasters to come, rumbling with Old Testament awe and a literally Earth-shattering scenario. A rogue star's gatecrashed the solar system and snookerballing straight for us. The solution is space-age Noah: build a half-pipe on a mountain-side and launch a terraforming rocket to its orbiting planet, Zyra. Offering human relief from the scientific gobbledegookery is Richard Derr, who appears to be impersonating Danny Kaye on steroids. The scale-model FX and bath-tub tsunamis are of its era, but then, so are the themes. The star may as well have a Hitler moustache. Released in 1951, post-War optimism and communal civility abound, as does the sloganeering propaganda (TIME IS OUR SHORTEST MATERIAL!). Disaster 101, then, right down to the rescued fluffy puppy.

Maté's movie is colossally influential. As if to prove a point, the algorithms bosh me into ***2012***. There's an Earth-shattering scenario (neutrinos microwaving the core) and a space-age Noah solution (a fleet of tsumani-proof arks). Sound familiar? Inspired by the rubbish Mayan non-prophecy, Roland Emmerich's fourth disaster-buster establishes him not just as the new Irwin Allen but a serial-killer of civilisations. Trains hit planes. Skyscrapers domino. Entire cities slide into the sea. This is daftageddon at full farce, where monumental FX feed epic, psychopathic levels of absurdity. Why bother saving the US President when there's the option of hitting him in the face with an aircraft carrier? Hollywood being Hollywood, *2012*'s hero is John Cusack's limo-driver because, well, just imagine a world without limo-drivers. Somehow, he blags his way onto the ark. Emmerich also makes space for a small yappy dog because, well, just imagine a world without small yappy dogs.



2012's excess looks a model of restraint compared to ***10.0 Earthquake***, a parody by mistake from the makers of *Terrordactyl*. "We punched the crust!" yells an expendable extra as a fracking company reduces LA to a lava-basin. Uniquely, the ensuing super-quake appears to have its own personality, stalking its cast like a seismic Jaws. As buildings shatter like crap CG meringues, we're treated to a lengthy conversation about whether to buy cheesecake or cupcakes. Jeffrey Jones hams it up as a nutty geologist but the movie has more faults than San Andreas. There's a lesson here: if you don't have the fracking budget, don't make a fracking disaster movie. Fabulously, as humanity's crushed to smithereens, a dog gets rescued BY PERSONAL HELICOPTER.



Force Majeure offers both a change of pace and a truly devious genre-subversion, going where no other disaster movie has gone before — the aftermath. Twenty minutes in and calamity's already struck. In one continuous static shot, an avalanche crumbles down the Alps and surges through a café balcony. Miraculously, everyone escapes unharmed, but as a Swedish family surface from the shock, a black truth looms from the white-out: dad legged it from the scene. Cue emotional wreckage and a marriage breakdown played as merciless, icy cringe-com. Imagine, if you can bear it, Joanna Hogg making a disaster movie: that's *Force Majeure*, and it's tremendous. No rescued dogs. Dogs can't ski.



If *Majeure* is off-piste, ***Bug***, cinema's weirdest disaster flick, is off-the-Richter-scale. First, an earthquake gouges a Californian town. Then a plague of pyromaniac cockroaches spit out from the Earth's core. This was William Castle's last movie (publicity-stunt tagline: "THE PICTURE YOU SEE WITH YOUR EYES CLOSED!"), blending nature-gone-wild with mad-scientist horror as Bradford Dillman unwisely mutates the firebugs into flying missiles. Priceless moment: a housewife reciting a recipe for chicken mousse as her roach-infected hair slowly catches fire. It sounds ridiculous, but Dillman's untamed intensity and the squibbly synth score bake up an oppressive fever-dream that drills right under the skin. No rescued dogs. But we do get a gratuitously fried cat. Me-ouch...

• ILLUSTRATION: PETER STRAIN

NEW TO STREAMING

Green Lantern

★

OUT **FEBRUARY 2** / CERT. **12**

A



Ryan Reynolds with an Oxo cube (maybe).

THE PARALLAX REVIEW

FEW FILMS IN recent times have been given so thorough a kicking as *Green Lantern*. Some of the piss-taking has come from the movie's star, Ryan Reynolds, who in a particularly meta moment in the *Deadpool* trailer snarks, "Please don't make the super-suit green. Or animated!" But it's not just Reynolds — the film is widely derided by comic-book fans, and it performed so disastrously on its release in 2011 that it destroyed plans to launch a franchise. Warner Bros. isn't even attempting to reboot it as part of its newly minted DC Cinematic Universe until 2020 (and then with the title *Green Lantern Corps*, to put even more distance between that and this).

But, five years on, now that the intergalactic dust has settled a bit, is *Green Lantern*'s terrible reputation fully deserved?

The answer, sadly, is yes. *Green Lantern* could almost be a set text for prospective comic-book movie directors, a what-not-to-do guide to help prevent them getting it catastrophically wrong. It's a strange movie, entirely unsuited to its director, Martin Campbell, whose biggest triumphs — GoldenEye and Casino Royale — were grounded and gritty affairs. This flashy space opera, with swathes of CG aliens and badly composited backgrounds, at least two villains with enlarged foreheads and a wholly presumptuous post-credits sting that sets up a sequel that would never be, was simply not Campbell's cup of tea. You can almost feel his disdain for the source material — it must be hard to direct while holding your nose. Hopefully Taika Waititi, the brilliant Kiwi actor and director wasted here as Tom Kalmaku, was taking notes — his next gig is directing *Thor: Ragnarok*.

Like so many comic-book movies these days, it has a cast that wouldn't look out of place on a Broadway stage: Angela Bassett, Mark Strong (who had to endure this farrago in the same year as *John Carter*, the poor guy), Tim Robbins, Peter Sarsgaard, Blake Lively and, of course, Reynolds. Yet it gives them nothing to do but yell and scream and look vaguely embarrassed. Even Reynolds' fast-talking charms are consumed utterly by the charisma-draining powers of the green-screen. No wonder he's so keen to put the boot in. CHRIS HEWITT

ALSO STREAMING



PREDESTINATION

SM

A little-seen but darn good sci-fi thriller from 2014, in which a time-traveller from 1992 goes to 1970 to try to stop a bombing in 1975. It's less complicated than we just made it sound, and features an ace turn from Ethan Hawke.

FROM FEBRUARY 5



THE LIMEY

N

Steven Soderbergh's tale of a British ex-con (Terence Stamp) investigating his daughter's death in LA. Riffing on *Point Blank* and *Get Carter*, it's a sun-baked noir that also stars a spectacularly slimy Peter Fonda.

FROM FEBRUARY 3



MAD MAX: FURY ROAD

SM

George Miller's 2015 reboot has already attained classic status. On repeat viewings it's just as mesmerising, and the score by Tom Holkenborg (also composing for *Batman V Superman*) just as smashing.

FROM FEBRUARY 26



ENCHANTED

A

Starring an utterly charming Amy Adams, this live-action fairy tale drops a magical princess into modern-day Manhattan. The highlight is *Happy Working Song*, an inspired Disney riff in which New York vermin clean an apartment.

FROM FEBRUARY 26



HIGH PLAINS DRIFTER

N

From 1973, with a ghost gunslinger and a dwarf sheriff, Clint Eastwood's first stab at directing a Western is uniquely weird and haunting. It disturbed John Wayne so much, he sent Clint a letter of complaint.

FROM FEBRUARY 10



BRIDESMAIDS

A

Get primed for Paul Feig's *Ghostbusters* reboot with his 2011 smash hit, in which a group of funny women do battle not with dark supernatural forces, but undercooked meat. The food-poisoning scene is one of the funniest movie set-pieces in years.

FROM FEBRUARY 14



BLOODY SUNDAY

N

Paul Greengrass was hired to direct *The Bourne Supremacy* off the back of this critically acclaimed drama, which portrays the 1972 shootings in Derry, Northern Ireland. A number of the military characters are played by British Army veterans.

FROM FEBRUARY 6



Hellraiser I II III

★★★★

1987-'92 / FROM **NOW** / CERT. **18**

BR

BLOODY GOOD FUN

THERE ARE NINE *Hellraiser* movies, but this box set includes only the first three. Writer-director Clive Barker's *Hellraiser* (1987), a (literally) spiky little British film, kicked off the franchise. Tony Randel's *Hellbound: Hellraiser II* (1988) and Anthony Hickox's *Hellraiser III: Hell On Earth* (1992), both scripted by Peter Atkins, try to hew to the Barkerian vision, though there's a sense of tentacled corporate entities hoping for a franchise like the *Elm Street* or *Halloween* films. The mythology is streamlined and a template laid down for a potentially unending saga, in which nail-studded demon Pinhead (Doug Bradley) pops out of that intriguing puzzle-box with chains and hooks to torment a succession of unwary idiots.

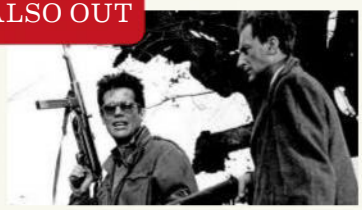
Hellraiser is always worth revisiting, and Barker's slight case of first-time-director shakes even works in its favour. The strange plot-lurches — plus Clare Higgins' electrifying evil gaze and Andrew Robinson's save-it-all-for-the-last-scene creepiness ("Jesus wept") — serve to keep the viewer off-balance throughout. Pinhead and associated creatures might have become overfamiliar since 1987, but in the context of their first showing they remain unique and disturbing.

Hellbound and *Hell On Earth* are contrasting sequels. The hurried part two is a mess, climaxing with a titanic struggle in a hellscape which looks like a prog-rock album cover, but boasts Kenneth Cranham dangling from a giant penis that has drilled into his skull, while Higgins relishes promotion from wicked stepmother to evil queen. *III* is a formulaic 1990s horror picture — conventionally paced and pretty watchable, playing down the maniacal, visionary streak that is the franchise's most distinctive feature.

Hellbound: Hellraiser II: The root canal filling hadn't quite gone to plan.

If you're a *Hellraiser* fan, this set offers so much bonus material it'll be like being delightfully tormented for eternity. The Blu-ray transfers are mostly gorgeous, if occasionally unforgiving of that slightly blurred, dusty '80s disco look of the earlier films. New 'making of' documentaries and retrospective features held over from DVD issues run longer than the films themselves, with input from seemingly everyone involved except (oddly) Barker, though he is present on commentary tracks and in vintage on-set interviews. A fourth disc includes yet more documentaries and a (terrible) fan-made short film spin-off. A nicely designed hardback book and a folder of artwork add even more *Hellraiser*iness. **KIM NEWMAN**

ALSO OUT



Ashes & Diamonds

★★★★★

1958 / FROM **NOW** / CERT. **12** BR

Shimmering in black-and-white, Andrezj Wajda's brilliant thriller observes the political fall-out in Poland after the Nazis have fled. Tasked with killing a communist lackey, Zbigniew Cybulski — the epitome of post-war freedom-fighter chic, fortified in rock-star shades — would rightly win global acclaim and torment proof-readers for evermore. IN



Wild Orchid

★★

1989 / FROM **FEBRUARY 8** / CERT. **18** DVD BR

In *9½ Weeks*, Mickey Rourke ate a small picnic off Kim Basinger's bod. This reunion with director Zalman King is a less effective erotic thriller, playing out like *Fifty Shades Of Neon* as Rourke's businessman seduces ingénue Carré Otis in Brazil. There's more sax than sex, Otis is wooden and it makes Rio look like Swindon. NDS

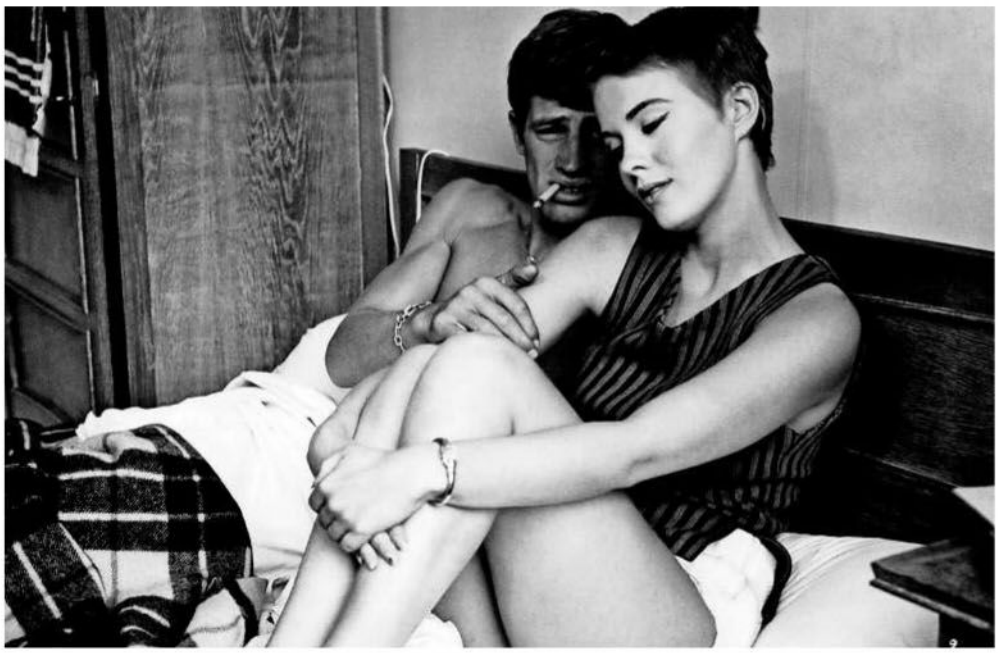


Hiroshima Mon Amour

★★★★

1959 / FROM **NOW** / CERT. **12** BR

Alain Resnais' account of a brief affair between a French woman and Japanese man is a landmark of the French New Wave. The sexual politics have dated, but the melancholy mood and striking cinematography stand up, and the trauma of the Hiroshima bombing echoes strongly, adding weight to the dilemmas of the central pair. HOH



Godard: The Essential Collection

★★★★★

1960-'66 / FROM **FEBRUARY 1** / CERT. **15**

BR

Top: Jean-Paul Belmondo and Jean Seberg, smokin' hot in *Breathless*. **Below:** Brigitte Bardot shines in *Le Mépris*.

À BOUT DE BOXSET

THIS STUNNING collection of Jean-Luc Godard's early stuff is the perfect gateway drug to the work of cinema's most gleeful revolutionary. A leading light in the French New Wave, Godard mashed up the good stuff — Hollywood, politics, philosophy, '60s Paris, literature, gorgeous people doing cool things — into a movie Molotov cocktail. Packed to *les gills* with extras — eight hours of docs, interviews and ephemera — this is a valuable reminder of his rare genius.

Like all great artists (Picasso, Mozart, Pasquale), Godard's career can be divided into distinct phases. This set covers the early, funny ones (1960-'66), a period that was all about Godard's passion for genre reinvention, taking in crime (*Breathless*, *Pierrot Le Fou*), sci-fi (*Alphaville*), musicals (*Un Femme Est Une Femme*) and backstage dramas (*Le Mépris*).

It starts with Godard's calling card, *Breathless* (1960). Cinema's version of freeform jazz, Godard scats through a thin plot — French car thief (Jean-Paul Belmondo) goes on the lam with his American girlfriend (Jean Seberg) — by improvising jump-cuts, monologues, shaky camerawork and movie quotations. It's the stuff you see in every indie flick/pop promo, but 50 years earlier and better.

This set is also a tribute to Godard's first wife, Anna Karina. It is possible to read *Une Femme Est Une Femme* (1961), *Alphaville* (1965) and *Pierrot Le Fou* (1965) as a barometer of Godard's love life. *Une Femme...* follows a stripper (Karina) who wants to settle down, but is really a look at the nascent Godard-Karina relationship, the back-and-forth between a cold man and a passionate woman. It is Godard's warmest film. Then *Pierrot Le Fou* plays out like a long goodbye, a thinly veiled portrait of the faltering Godard-Karina marriage masquerading as a lush-looking study of violence, both emotional and global, as Belmondo's husband runs off with Karina's babysitter.

Godard's obsession with romantic disintegration is present without Karina — but with Brigitte Bardot — in *Le Mépris* (1963). Following a film crew adapting Homer's *The Odyssey*, it's a melancholy look at creating art and the end of love. Beautiful to look at, intellectually rich and full of emotion, it may just be Godard's masterpiece. IAN FREER



"The perfect distillation of Lynch's lifelong obsessions."


1


2


3

Blue Velvet

1986 / OUT **NOW** / CERT. **18**

DVD BR

BABY WANTS TO WATCH

"IT'S A STRANGE WORLD," YOUNG Jeffrey Beaumont (Kyle MacLachlan) tells high-school senior Sandy (Laura Dern) following his macabre discovery in some scrubland in the town of Lumberton, North Carolina: a severed human ear.

If the world was strange before, it became a good deal stranger in September 1986, when David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* snuck into just under 100 US cinemas. Establishing the writer-director's theme of exposing darkness beneath the surface of American normalcy, viewing it was like watching a Norman Rockwell painting be scraped away to reveal a hitherto unknown work by Bosch or Munch. Novelist J. G. Ballard had a different reference point, summing up the film as "*The Wizard Of Oz* reshot with a script by Kafka and décor by Francis Bacon." In fact, *Blue Velvet*'s mix of beauty and horror should be credited to Frederick Elmes' vivid cinematography, Angelo Badalamenti's musical cues and Alan Splet's disturbing soundscapes. Plus, of course, the man who dreamed the whole mad thing up in the first place.

Lynch first had the idea to make a contemporary thriller with teenage heroes prior to making 1980's *The Elephant Man*. Three years later, he agreed to adapt Frank Herbert's epic sci-fi novel *Dune* on the proviso that producer Dino De Laurentiis would both finance *Blue Velvet* afterwards and give Lynch final cut. As Lynch recalls, three disparate ideas coalesced to form the basis of the story of young Jeffrey Beaumont's journey into the dark side of a small town. "The first was Bobby Vinton's song and the mood that came with that song — a mood, a time, and things that were of that time," he has said. "The next idea I got was that I always wanted to sneak into a girl's room at night and just watch her.... I would see a clue, whether I knew it then or later, an important clue to a mystery, like a murder. Then the third idea was the ear in the field, because it would be like finding a ticket to another world. You know, it would change your life." Lynch sets out his stall early in the film, with the startling colours of his opening montage of American suburban scenes introducing two potent symbols: first, the pressure of a kinked hose building to bursting point; then the swarm of beetles lurking beneath the Beaumonts' lawn. There's something rotten in the state of NC.

It's intriguing to wonder what *Blue Velvet* might have looked like if cast as Lynch originally intended: with Val Kilmer as Jeffrey, Molly Ringwald as Sandy, Harry Dean Stanton as gangster Frank Booth and Helen Mirren as tragic moll Dorothy Vallens — all of whom turned the film down due to its dark tone. As it is, each of the actors Lynch ultimately cast — MacLachlan, Dern, Dennis Hopper and Isabella Rossellini (with whom Lynch became romantically involved) — would deliver indelible performances, with Hopper in particular creating one of cinema's greatest antagonists in the certifiably psychotic Frank. Clad in a black leather jacket and staring with the intensity of a Gorgon, he inhales amyl nitrate from a portable tank (at Hopper's suggestion, replacing the helium tank Lynch had envisaged), forces Dorothy to perform sexual favours and yells things like, "Do it for van Gogh!"

Although *Blue Velvet* was greeted with critical acclaim, and earned Lynch a second Oscar nomination for Best Director — he lost to Oliver Stone for *Platoon* — it was Frank's treatment of Dorothy that led some critics to decry the film as pornographic and misogynistic. In an infamous one-star review, Roger Ebert accused Lynch of being "more sadistic than the Hopper character" in the way he framed Dorothy's horrific experiences with "jokey, small-town satire". Thirty years on, *Blue Velvet* feels like the perfect distillation of Lynch's lifelong obsessions, notably the stripping away of the veneer of American life to reveal the horror and despair beneath, themes to which he would return in *Twin Peaks* and *Mulholland Drive*. Lynch, the former Eagle Scout who described his upbringing as unfailingly happy and uneventful, could find darkness in the most innocent of places: beneath the picket fences and sprinkler-fed lawns of suburbia, in the flawed beauty of Rossellini, in Bobby Vinton's dreamy titular torch song. He even found a way to make seemingly innocent lyrics such as "Love letters straight from your heart" (from Kitty Lester's *Love Letters*) and "In dreams I walk with you" (from Roy Orbison's *In Dreams*) spine-shiveringly sinister.

From velvet-curtained overture to clockwork-robin denouement, *Blue Velvet* is an enduring American masterpiece, oscillating discomfortingly between dreamlike eccentricity and nightmarish intensity, and as strange, disturbing and full of mystery as the underworld into which Jeffrey finds himself drawn.

Unless, of course, it was all a dream.

1 Dennis Hopper's Frank, Isabella Rossellini's Dorothy and a handy shot of amyl nitrate.
2 Kyle MacLachlan's Jeremy gets caught up in the drama.
3 Jeremy with his true love, detective's daughter Sandy (Laura Dern).

WORDS
DAVID HUGHES

Archive

THE MONTH'S BIGGEST RE-RELEASES

WORDS **SIMON CROOK**

Mr. Majestyk
1974
★★★



FROM **NOW**
CERT. **18**
BR

→ Mobster versus melon-farmer. Namechecked by *True Romance*'s Drexl, *Mr. Majestyk* features motherfuggin' Charlie Bronson on prime, surly form, relishing the snap of Elmore Leonard's dialogue as a fruit-growing, Mafia-busting vigilante. No-nonsense, pump-action pulp, plus vrooming car chases and the best watermelon massacre in cinema history.

A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To The Forum
1966
★★★



FROM **FEBRUARY 22**
CERT. **PG**
BR

→ "Something for everyone!" sings Zero Mostel over the credits of this Broadway adaptation. That may be overstating the appeal of Roman musical farces. Stephen Sondheim's earworm tunes are timeless, but Richard Lester's hyper-jaunty direction hasn't dated well. Notable for a 70 year-old Buster Keaton (he speaks!) in his deadpan final screen outing.

Koyaanisqatsi
1982
★★★★



FROM **FEBRUARY 15**
CERT. **PG**
BR

→ If Voyager 1 blasted into space with one film as an Earthly ambassador, this would be it: a planet-wide eco-opera of beauty and turmoil. Open your brain-lid, and Godfrey Reggio's visual dance of time-lapse and slo-mo offers a truly transcendent experience. Though Philip Glass' overbearing choral score won't be everyone's tempo.

Dr. Goldfoot And The Bikini Machine
1965
★★★



FROM **NOW**
CERT. **PG**
DVD BR

→ It has a kiss button! And a kill button! Remember *Austin Powers*' fembots? The prototypes can be found within this '60s spy spoof, featuring honeytrap androids, seduced tycoons and Vincent Price as the titular lip-smacking Franken-swine. Daft, delicious kitsch a-go-go. Also out: the sequel (with "Girl Bombs"!) directed by, of all people, slasher king Mario Bava.

Sinbad Of The Seven Seas
1989
★★



FROM **FEBRUARY 8**
CERT. **15**
DVD BR

→ Boulder ogres, kinky witches, zombie knights, laser-puking snot-monsters: all await Lou Ferrigno's Sinbad in this fantasy Italian trash-fest that's like an Ed Wood remake of *Conan*. Ex-Hulk Ferrigno displays the agility of a wardrobe. Dubbed direlogue and shonky FX abound. Laugh you might — and laugh you will — but for so-bad-it's-good buffs there's never a dull moment.

Children Of The Corn Trilogy
1984-'95
★★★



FROM **FEBRUARY 8**
CERT. **18**
DVD BR

→ Like a runaway combine harvester, the *Corn* franchise has churned *nine* films from Stephen King's short story. All feature killer kids and a demonic agri-cult. Part one retains a creepy mystique. Part two is cobblers. Part three, easily the best, takes the field of screams to Chicago, with surreal FX from 'Screaming Mad George', the Salvador Dalú of splatter.

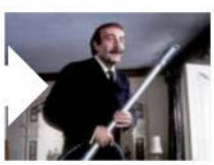
Jumanji
1995
★★★



FROM **NOW**
CERT. **PG**
BR

→ Like a ouija board drunk on Um Bungo, a magical game curses its players, each dice-roll unleashing a new exotic threat: lions, rhinos, hairy Robin Williams. The set-up's ace. *Jumanji*'s problem is its plot, trampled under a stampede of CGI. Story loses, spectacle wins. Worth another throw, if only for the traffic-trashing, telly-nicking, movie-stealing monkeys.

The Return Of The Pink Panther
1975
★★★★



FROM **NOW**
CERT. **PG**
BR

→ Or the one with the "minky". And Cato jumping out the freezer. And the vacuumed parrot. Gag for gag, this fourth outing is *the* definitive Clouseau, opening with a deceptively silent jewel heist, then jamming you into a revolving door of relentless, raucous slapstick. By 1975, Peter Sellers had perfected his pompous klutz. The result is comedy gurld.

Kramer Vs. Kramer
1979
★★★★



FROM **FEBRUARY 15**
CERT. **PG**
BR

→ Naughty Dustin Hoffman didn't forewarn Meryl Streep about his glass-smashing fit during Kramer's restaurant bust-up scene. Hence Meryl's shock. Chronicling the breakdown of the Great American Family, this custody-battle classic is powered by a raw intimacy that overrides its soapy status. Still no sign of Marty DiBergi's long-threatened sequel, *Kramer Vs. Kramer Vs. Godzilla*.



Xenoblade Chronicles X

★★★★★

OUT **NOW** / **Wii U**

A WHOLE NEW WORLD

IN A YEAR WHEN *Fallout 4* and *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* ruled the roost, you might expect Wii U devotees to have felt starved of open-world games in which to lose themselves. But with *Xenoblade Chronicles X*, Nintendo fans have an audacious exclusive that's as good as the competition, and arguably the finest freewheeling adventure of all.

Staged on the unspoiled world of Mira, *XCX* is the story of the last remnants of humanity, who are forced to abandon Earth when it's devastated by alien forces. An escape ship, the White Whale, narrowly dodges the carnage — but once it crashes on Mira, fearless pioneers dare to step out into uncharted territory to gather resources, defeat towering monsters and lay the foundations for a brave new world.

Although the Wii U lacks the processing grunt of its rivals, *XCX* nonetheless offers an exquisite world; a landscape of rolling prairies, colossal mountain ranges and dense forests that feels overwhelming when you first step into the unknown, but is an endlessly rewarding microcosm to explore.

Building on the traditions of Japanese RPGs, *XCX* sees players crossing Mira alongside three computer-controlled allies, and defending themselves against the planet's eclectic fauna in turn-based battles. Defeating enemies and earning experience allows players to evolve their avatar and improve their team's battlefield prowess, and as missions and powers are unlocked as your skills blossom, a glowing sense of achievement is never far away.

XCX isn't without some minor problems. For starters, vital information — including the confusing healing system — isn't fully explained, and players are forced to spend time poring over the manual to find answers. Crucially, seeing the best Mira has to offer also requires extraordinary patience, and anyone who spends fewer than 40 hours with the title won't even scratch the surface, or pilot the Skell machines that allow you to bridge huge distances.

But with an awe-inspiring world, gripping gameplay and a sense of adventure that's unrivalled anywhere else on the Wii U, this is an experience no Nintendo fan should consider missing. **DAVID McCOMB**

KILL THE COMMUTE



LAST HORIZON
iOS/ANDROID
This rotate-and-thrust space game conjures echoes of arcade classic *Asteroids* as you try to colonise a galaxy full of potential hazards, collecting resources and struggling with the two most deadly foes of all: gravity and inertia. It's precision fun, but beware: if you die once, that's your lot — the future of your civilisation abruptly curtailed by one dud landing.



WARHAMMER 40,000: FREEBLADE
iOS/ANDROID
Another day, another 40k title. This entertaining on-rails shooter is custom-built to take advantage of the 3D Touch on the iPhone 6S but works just as well without. Players stomp around as a 50-foot Imperial Knight, bashing up everything in sight and indulging in trigger-happy fun as long as your patience lasts. The array of in-app purchases are easily ignored.


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Exclusive edition on DVD format only. Limited stock and availability. Selected stores only.

The Art Of Star Wars: The Force Awakens

★★★★★

AUTHOR **PHIL SZOSTAK** / OUT **NOW**

ALTERNATIVE REALITIES

IF YOU'VE EVER wondered what the first lightsaber looked like (spoiler: it's primarily sticks and twine), then this compendium from Lucasfilm image archivist Phil Szostak deserves a place on your coffee table. Taking a chronological stroll through the archives, Szostak's book charts *The Force Awakens*' visuals, from early sketches to finalised designs.

This isn't just another bunch of TIE Fighter watercolours (although it has a few); what's fascinating here are the depictions of what might have been. Rey (then called Kira) hanging out of an X-Wing cockpit, carving up the hull of a Star Destroyer with her lightsaber; a Resistance superweapon called the Warhammer; a tattooed Twi'lek Sith with dual 'sabers. The book delves into Michael Arndt's earliest treatments — long before the screenwriter handed the reins over to Abrams and Kasdan — unearthing a hoard of unused ideas that signpost the many, wildly divergent iterations the story went through.

It's heavy on visuals and light on copy, but you're well advised to scour every word. Huge plot bombshells are blithely dropped into picture captions and squirrelled away in the margins. Poe, we learn, was originally a bounty hunter with his own Wookiee sidekick; Kylo Ren (then just 'the Jedi Killer') originally wielded a double-bladed lightsaber, half red and half blue; Hayden Christensen was to make an appearance, his ghost fluctuating between Anakin and Vader; Rey could have taken the Falcon underwater, diving into the sunken trench of a submerged second Death Star. And that's just a drop in the ocean.



Concept art of intergalactic cowboy Han Solo.



Information orgy aside, the book's artwork is gorgeous, with paintings, sketches and compositions from Rick Carter's crack team of visualists. Stunning panoramas of Jakku and Takodana compete with intricate ship designs and a vast assortment of Jedi Killer submissions that were rejected by Abrams before he settled on the chrome-rimmed visage of Kylo Ren.

Buy it for the art, the insights or just to see Han Solo dressed like Jeff Bridges in *True Grit*. Most of all, buy it for a glimpse of how wildly different the film might have been in a parallel universe. **JAMES DYER**

FURTHER READING

MORE GOODIES FOR THE LIBRARY OF ANY SELF-RESPECTING *STAR WARS* OBSESSIVE



Star Wars: The Force Awakens Visual Dictionary
Detailed cut-aways and schematics — the Haynes manual of *Episode VII*.



Star Wars: The Force Awakens
The official tie-in novelisation from Alan Dean Foster, who wrote the original back in '77.



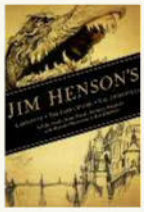
Star Wars Storyboards: The Original Trilogy
The first three films, shot-by-shot, including deleted scenes and notes from artist Joe Johnston.

ALSO OUT

From The Jim Henson Archives novel box set

★★★★★

AUTHORS **ANTHONY MINGHELLA, A. C. H. SMITH** / OUT **NOW**

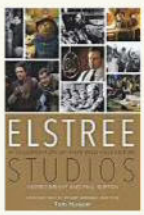


→ Most tie-in novelisations are inessential. But this set, with hardcover adaptations of three Jim Henson classics, is both visually lavish and a fascinating read. The words were overseen by the Muppet man himself (as proven by copious notes within); you also get never-before-seen photos, concept art and doodles. A must-buy for any Hensonhead. **NDS**

Elstree Studios: A Celebration Of Film And Television

★★

AUTHOR **MORRIS BRIGHT** / OUT **NOW**



→ A comprehensive account of one of London's oldest studios, this has some fascinating pictures but starchy text. The leaden prose makes it almost impossible to read, and folding landmark eras like Alfred Hitchcock's tenure and the *Star Wars* shoots into the same narrative as lesser films tends to diminish the studio's glorious history. **HOH**

Django/Zorro

★★★★

AUTHORS **QUENTIN TARANTINO, MATT WAGNER, ESTEVE POLLS** / OUT **NOW**



→ Quentin Tarantino's first official sequel takes the form of this graphic novel, teaming gunslinger Django with legendary bladesman Don Diego for a rip-roaring adventure. The dialogue is a little vanilla (Tarantino gets a "story by" rather than writing credit), but it's beautifully drawn and mixes old-fashioned thrills with bloody havoc to satisfying effect. What next: *Aldo Raine/Biggles*? **NDS**

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CREED

LUDWIG GÖRANSSON ON TEN KEY TRACKS FROM HIS ROCKY-SEQUEL SCORE

WORDS **CHRIS HEWITT**

1 Juvy

I wanted a score that tells Creed's story. In the beginning Adonis (*Michael B. Jordan*) doesn't know anything of who he is or where he's from. I wanted the music to feel that too — it doesn't have a shape, like some form of chaos.

2 Adonis

It was really important to define a theme that could travel with Donny. The theme changes shape, it changes instrumentation, from me humming it through an auto-tune vocoder with guitars, to a really bombastic, orchestral, eight-horns sound.

3 Meeting Rocky

A key scene. The theme in the beginning is actually the one for Conlan (*Creed's opponent, played by Tony Bellew*); that's in the bass in the background. Then it transitions into a horn melody which is Creed's theme, but with the harp in the background it feels like *Rocky*. There's a noble, older touch to the theme.

4 Conlan (Redemption)

This was the first theme I wrote for the movie. I had an idea at first that it would be Creed's theme, but it felt too dark and didn't work for him.

5 First Date

It plays up the romance between Donny and Bianca (*Tessa Thompson*), but then it goes into the theme from the first *Rocky*, on the date Rocky and Adrian had. It feels like Rocky thinking about Creed's theme.

Above: Men in the mirror Rocky (Sylvester Stallone) and Donny (Michael B. Jordan). **Below:** *Creed* composer Ludwig Göransson.



6 The Sporino Fight

I really wanted to make the audience feel claustrophobic. I went to a gym in Oakland and recorded a boxer punching a speed bag. I took that, pitched it down, added this hip-hop sub-bass under it.

7 Rocky Is Sick

It's the first time you hear the *Rocky* theme in the movie, playing on the piano. It transitions seamlessly into Creed's theme on the horn, but it still feels very reminiscent of Rocky and his character.

8 If I Fight, You Fight (Training Montage)

Every film composer's dream is to make training-montage music. I wanted it to be very singable, and when I wrote it for the choir, I told Ryan (*Coogler, director*), "You should put lyrics to this." It's a homage to *Gonna Fly Now* (*from the original* Rocky).

9 Conlan Fight

Stallone had a note on the score — "In the last fight, we need more music." So it became all the themes I'd written so far — it's almost a medley, with the themes for Conlan and Creed. But on steroids.

10 You're A Creed

At first Ryan was adamant that Creed have a sound of his own. But towards the end of the final fight, there's a moment where Rocky says to Donny that he should get up and take Conlan. It's the biggest moment in the film, so I put the Rocky fanfare in there, but grittier, dirtier, in a minor key.

EMPIRE PLAYLIST



Training Montages

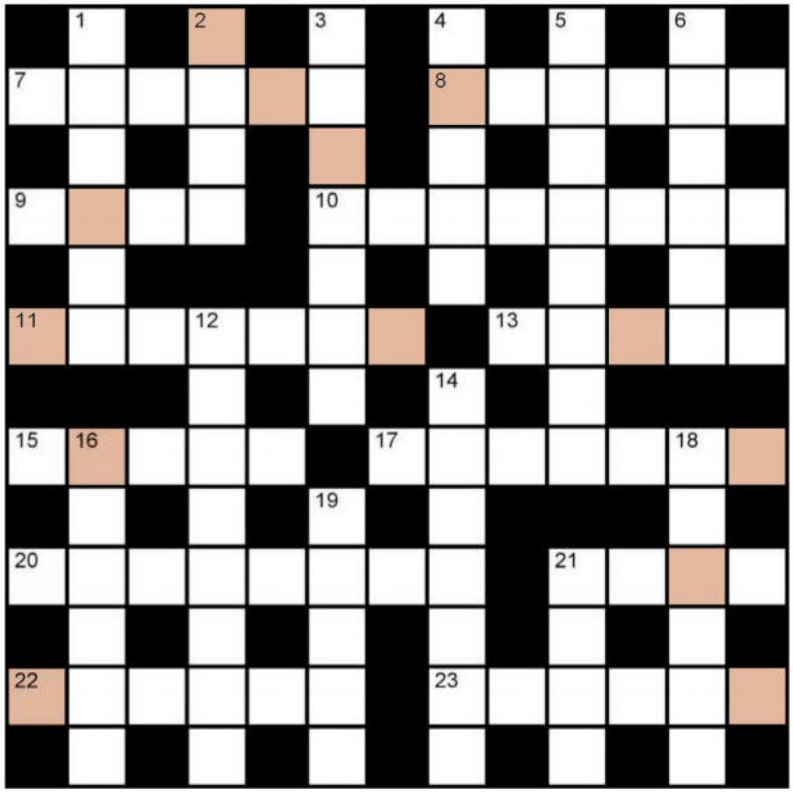
1. *Hearts On Fire* **John Cafferty** ***Rocky IV***
2. *Stand On Your Own* **Joe Torono** ***No Retreat, No Surrender***
3. *You're The Best* **Joe Esposito** ***The Karate Kid***
4. *Never* **Moving Pictures** ***Footloose***
5. *Number One* **Chaz Jankel** ***Real Genius***
6. *Hungry Eyes* **Eric Carmen** ***Dirty Dancing***
7. *Prologue/Anvil Of Crom* **Basil Poledouris** ***Conan The Barbarian***
8. *Life's Incredible Again* **Michael Giacchino** ***The Incredibles***
9. *One Last Hope* **Danny DeVito** ***Hercules***
10. *Meet Me Half Way* **Kenny Loggins** ***Over The Top***
11. *Chariots Of Fire* **Vangelis** ***Chariots Of Fire***
12. *Gonna Fly Now* **Bill Conti** ***Rocky III***

TO LISTEN TO THE ABOVE, SEARCH 'EMPIRE MAGAZINE' ON SPOTIFY.

• GETTY IMAGES

144

THE **EMPIRE** CROSSWORD



ACROSS

7 Rock royal who provided *Purple Rain* (6)
8 Ridley Scott's bibically-inspired epic (6)
9 This Robert portrayed George Gershwin in *Rhapsody In Blue* (4)
10 Michael Winterbottom-directed film shot over five years (8)
11 In which Bill Clinton delivered his Mars rock speech (7)
13 This actor plays *The Expendables*' Yin Yang (5)
15 Michael, Martin or Charlie... (5)
17 In which Dustin became Dorothy (7)
20 Where Saoirse Ronan became an immigrant (8)
21 Did this item fly high for India Eisley? (4)
22 Philippe who was Alfredo in *Cinema Paradiso* (6)
23 It took Kate Winslet to Bletchley Park (6)

DOWN

1 Frank seen in *The Grey*, *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* etc. (6)
2 Paquin from the *X-Men* series (4)
3 Alfred Hitchcock's first US project (7)
4 *Jungle*, or possibly of the *Saturday Night* kind (5)
5 Confused Toby Head provides an erotic thriller for William Hurt and Kathleen Turner (4,4)
6 Robert — Best Actor Oscar winner for *Tender Mercies* (6)
12 Period that linked Julianne Moore, Nicole Kidman and Meryl Streep (3,5)
14 It provided Cicely Tyson with an Oscar nomination (7)
16 Werner, German director of *Queen Of The Desert* (6)
18 Did Justin Timberlake clock on for this one? (2,4)
19 For which Jane Fonda won a Best Actress Oscar (5)
21 Marshall seen in *Love Actually* (4)

WIN!



ROBERT ZEMECKIS' *THE WALK* STARS Joseph Gordon-Levitt as extraordinary Frenchman Philippe Petit, who made history when he attempted to cross the gap between the Twin Towers of New York's World Trade Center in 1974, with just a wire between him and a messy demise on the sidewalks of Manhattan some 1,350 feet below. Also starring Charlotte Le Bon and Sir Ben Kingsley, Zemeckis' film attempts to make sense of a unique, at times maddening individual. Available as a digital download now and out on DVD and Blu-ray on February 1, it's an intriguing tale from the man who brought us *Back To The Future*, *Cast Away* and *Forrest Gump*. We've got a copy of the film on Blu-ray, a Blu-ray player and a 43" smart LED telly for one lucky winner. To be in with a chance of winning, simply complete the crossword to the left, solve the anagram and text your answer to the number below. *Bonne chance*!

***THE WALK* IS OUT AS A DIGITAL DOWNLOAD NOW, AND ON DVD AND BLU-RAY ON FEBRUARY 1.**

Competition ends February 22

HOW TO ENTER Take the letters from each coloured square and rearrange them to form the name of an actor, actress, director or character. Text 'EMPIRE' to 83070, followed by your answer, name and address (with a space between each element of your message!). Texts cost 50p plus standard operator costs. Lines close at midnight, February 22. Winners are selected at random. See below for terms and conditions.

FEBRUARY ANSWERS ACROSS 7 Rififfi, **8** Oliver, **9** Demi, **10** Airplane, **11** Kingpin, **13** Croft, **15** Bambi, **17** Spectre, **20** Cellular, **21** Page, **23** Old Men, **24** Lethal. **DOWN 1** Life, **2** Viking, **3** Sicario, **4** Zorro, **5** Killer, **6** Jennifer, **12** Isabelle, **14** Sparkle, **16** Bel Ami, **18** Capote, **19** Clint, **22** Goal.

ANAGRAM LEONARDO DICAPRIO

TERMS AND CONDITIONS: One entry per person. Texts cost 50p + standard network rate. Ask the bill payer's permission before entering. Entries must be received before February 23 or will not be valid (but the cost of the text may still be charged). One winner will be selected at random. The model of the TV and Blu-ray may vary. Competition promoted by Bauer Consumer Media Limited t/a Empire ("Empire"). Empire's choice of winner is final and no correspondence will be entered into in this regard. The winner will be notified, by phone (on the number the text was sent), between seven and ten days after the competition ends. Empire will call the winner a maximum of three times and leave one message. If the winner does not answer the phone or respond to the message within 14 days of the competition's end, Empire will select another winner and the original winner will not win a prize. Entrants must be over 18, resident in the UK and not be employed by Empire. The prize is non-negotiable with no cash alternative. Empire is not responsible for late delivery or unsatisfactory quality of the prize. Entrants agree to the collection of their personal data in accordance with Empire's privacy policy: http://www.bauerdatapromise.co.uk/. Winner's personal details will be given to prize provider to arrange delivery of the prize. Bauer reserves the right to amend or cancel these terms or any aspect of the competition (including the prize) at any time if required for reasons beyond its control. Any questions, please email empire@bauermedia.co.uk. Complaints will not be considered if made more than 30 days after the competition ends. Winner's details available on request (after the competition ends) by emailing empire@bauermedia.co.uk. For full Ts&Cs see http://www.bauerlegal.co.uk/competition-terms.html.

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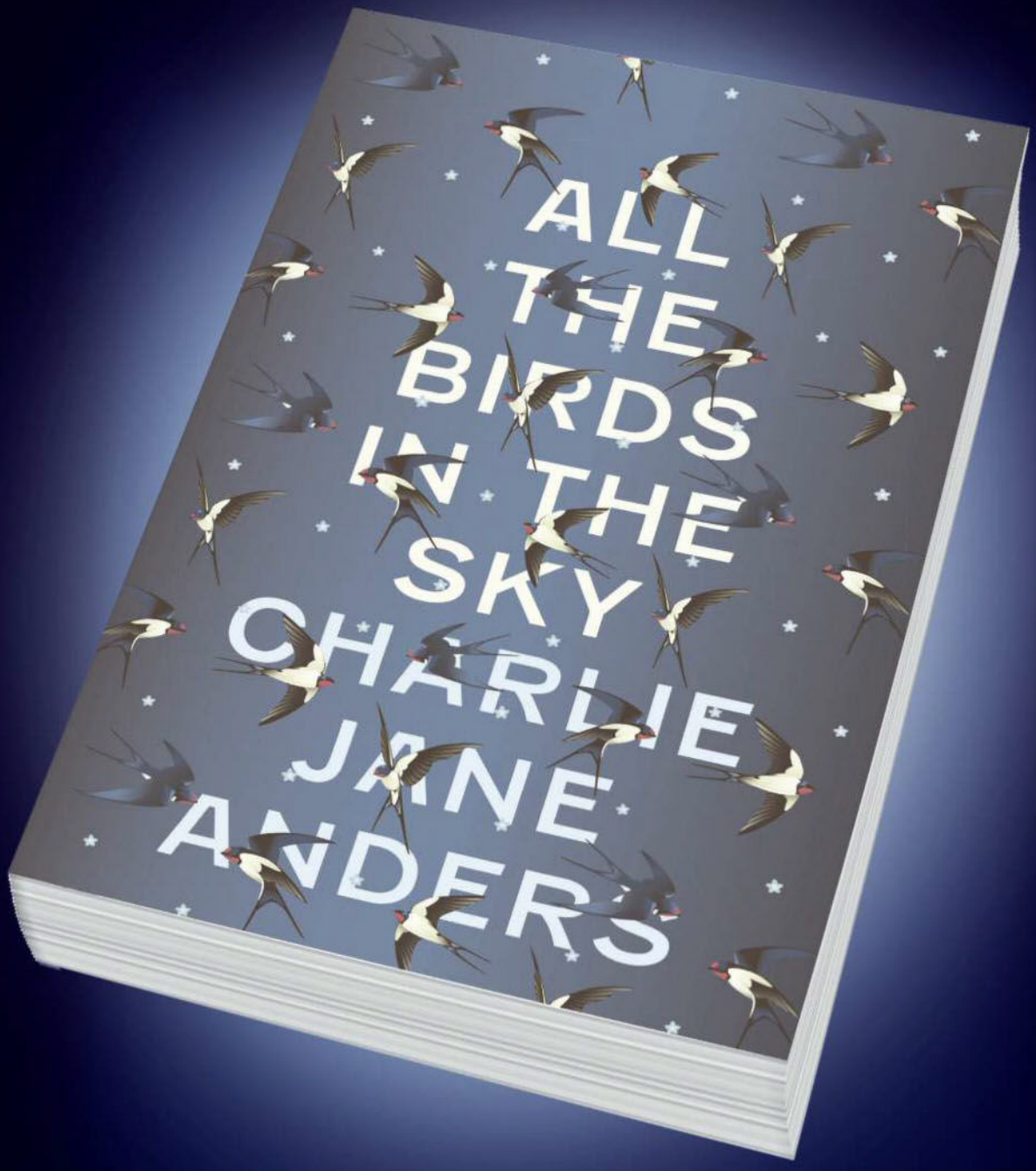
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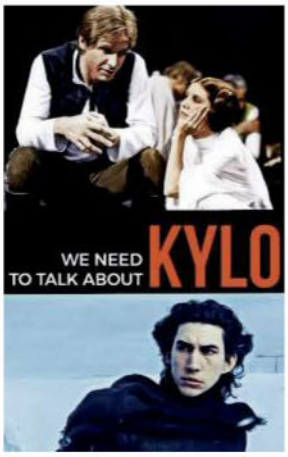


IS IT TRUE THAT THE *REVENANT* BEAR IS TO STAR AS PADDINGTON'S LONG-LOST FATHER IN *PADDINGTON 2: RABID PAPA*?

CHRIS MURPHY (@MURPHYSBORDOM)

Loving #Deadpool's hijack and intro to the latest digital issue of @empiremagazine. #meta

TAE MAWSON (@TOMAGEFRAIS)



TOO SOON? **PAUL HOLOHAN, DUBLIN**

Ben Mendelsohn is going to be in Spielberg's *Ready Player One* and my excitement levels are through the roof... This guy will have an Oscar within five years.

ALISTAIR STEWART, FACEBOOK

LETTER *of the* MONTH



FLASH FOR QUESTIONS

Hello, chaps — this letter is really directed towards your man Adam Smith, to answer a particular question raised in an article currently running on empireonline.com. In his history of *Flash Gordon*, Adam reports that he was unable to find out who supplied the voice for Flash after Sam J. Jones was over-dubbed. Well, that would be actor and VO artist Peter Marinker, who has made appearances in films such as *Event Horizon* and *Judge Dredd*, and provided the voice of Dr. Benn in the awesome '80s puppet show *Star Fleet*. Anyway, geekery over...

CHRIS FINNEY, VIA EMAIL

Thanks, Chris. This letter will save every one of us.

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PROTOCOL ACTUALLY

It might just be me but don't you think C-3PO would fit perfectly into the lead role of a Richard Curtis film?

PADDY EARLE, VIA EMAIL

Imagine watching the galaxy's fussiest droid in The Falcon That Rocked. *Odds of finishing it without throwing your TV out of the window: appoximately 3,720 to one.*



FORCE FANCIER

Until recently, I'd never seen *Star Wars*. With my husband excited about *The Force Awakens*, he sat me down to watch the first six, and I've gone from virgin to megafan! Artoo is my favourite, FYI.

KIM WILLIS, VIA EMAIL

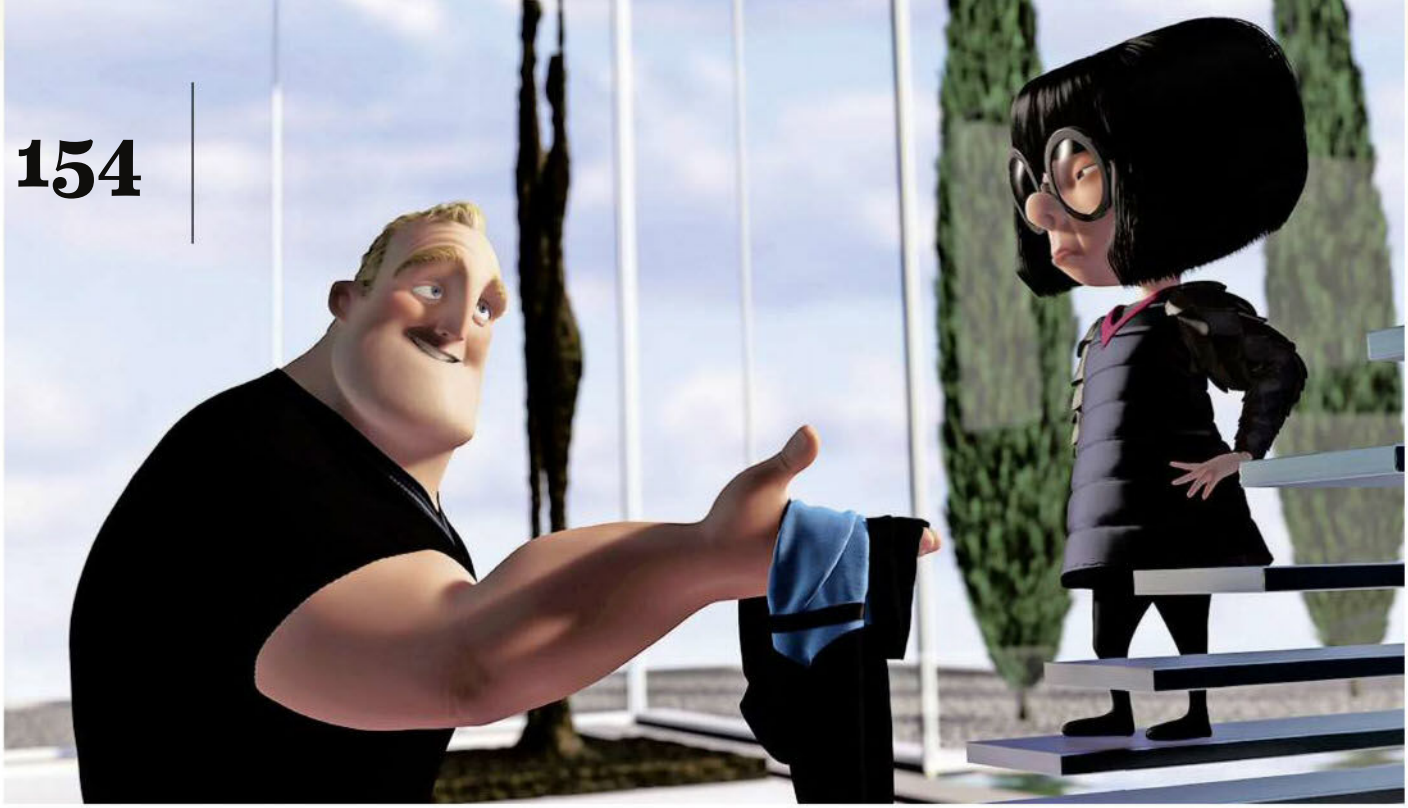
Glad you've joined the light side, Kim.

HEX EDUCATION

Thank you for featuring *Night Of The Demon* in *Classic Scene*. It terrified me when I saw it at the age of 12, and I still freak out when I think of the paw-prints in the forest. Interestingly, Jacques Tourneur wanted to show only a four-frame flash of the monster at the end, but was forced to include more by producer Hal Chester. Anyway, I'd like to see a remake, with Tom Hiddleston and Toby Jones.

MARINA BASSO, ESSEX

Andy Serkis as the monster? And the forest? Are there other black-and-white horrors which should be resurrected?



EMPIRE CLASSIC SCENE

The Incredibles

"NO CAPES!"

SETTING THE SCENE **If *Batman V Superman: Dawn Of Justice* features a scene in which one of the heroes gets his cape stuck in a door, they won't be able to say Edna Mode didn't warn them. This throwaway but show-stopping sequence from Brad Bird's 2004 animation pokes fun at a superhero trope, with retired fashion designer Mode (voiced by Bird himself) explaining exactly why it's a bad idea to fight crime while clad in a long, flappy cloak.**

INT. EDNA MODE'S RESIDENCE — DAY

Edna is with Mr. Incredible (Craig T. Nelson) in her sumptuous lobby.

Mr. Incredible: E, I just need a patch job.

He hands her his suit.

Edna: Hmm, this is megamesh. Outmoded, but very sturdy, and you've torn right through it. What have you been doing, Robert? Moonlighting hero work?

Mr. Incredible: Must've happened a long time ago.

Edna: I see. This is a hobo suit, darling! You can't be seen in this. I won't allow it! Fifteen years ago, maybe, but now...

Mr. Incredible: What do you mean? You designed it.

Edna: I never look back, darling. It distracts from the now. You need a new suit, that much is certain...

Mr. Incredible: A new suit? Where the heck am I gonna get a new...

Edna: You can't! It's impossible. I'm far too busy, so ask me now before I can become sane...

Mr. Incredible: Wait, you want to make me a suit?

Edna: You push too hard, darling! But I accept!

Edna swiftly produces a pad and pen.

Edna: It will be bold, dramatic, heroic...

Mr. Incredible: Yeah, something classic like...like...Dynaguy! Aw, he had a great look, the cape and the boots!

Edna throws a scrunched-up ball of paper at him.

Edna: No capes.

Mr. Incredible: Isn't that my decision?

Edna: Do you remember Thunderhead? Tall, storm powers, nice man, good with kids.

Mr. Incredible: Listen...

Edna: November 15th of '58!

Flashback: Thunderhead punches out a cackling villain.

Edna: All was well, another day saved, when his cape snagged on a missile fin.

Flashback: The rocket shoots into space, taking Thunderhead with it.

Mr. Incredible: Thunderhead was not the brightest bulb.

In a flashback montage, we see various superheroes meet untimely ends.

Edna: Stratogale! April 23rd, '57! Cape caught in a jet turbine!

Mr. Incredible: E, you can't generalise about these things...

Edna: Meta-Man: express elevator! Dynaguy: snagged on take-off! Splashdown: sucked into a vortex! No capes! Now go on, your new suit will be finished before your next assignment.

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